

VanDread Halo

by Freedom Guard

Category: Halo, Vandread

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2007-10-21 02:51:26

Updated: 2009-03-24 04:12:22

Packaged: 2016-04-27 02:14:38

Rating: M

Chapters: 17

Words: 307,162

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: The war with the Covenant and the UNSC is over...but an accident has changed the fates of one UNSC Spartan and a UNSC AI, as they are now in a new conflict and a new path in life.

## 1. Chapter 1

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: I do not own the Halo Universe series or VanDread. They are owned by Bungie and Gonzo respectively, I'm just a guy who loves both of them.

Prologue

Heroes

It was over

The nearly 30 years War between the United Nations Space Command and the Covenant was now at an end. Three decades where the human race was nearly brought to the brink of extinction by the combined might of several races bound by religion and faith. The UNSC Navy, and it's fellow military entities, the UNSC Army, and the UNSC Marine Corps lost countless numbers of it's soldiers, crew, equipment, ships, bases, outposts and more colonies such as Harvest, Reach, Paris IV, Sigma Octanus IV, and countless other human colonial worlds were glassed by the massive fleets of the Covenant.

It was not always this way nearly half a century before though

The United Nations Space Command, the exploratory, scientific, and military arm of the Colonial Administration Authority, and the United Earth Government, was founded by the United Nations when the over-population of Earth grew in the 22nd Century, and was under the jurisdiction of HIGHCOM. The UNSC saw action in the years of 2160 and

2164 when a series of brutal inter system wars filled the Sol System—including the Jovian Moons Campaign, the Rain Forest Wars, and the series of Battles in the Colonies of Mars, all during the time the United Nations dealt with dissident political groups, namely the neo communist faction known as the Koslovics, who formed under the teachings of Vladimir Koslov, and their enemies, the neo fascist movement known as the Frieden.

The war began when both factions launched separate but lethal attacks on UN advisors in the Io colony, but the supposed isolated attacks spread to Mars, then to the Rain Forests of South America and then to the Jovian Moons, which was known to be the home base of the Frieden, leading to the Jovian Moons Campaign, the Rain Forest Wars and Battles of Mars,. These wars and events led to the reformation of the UN from a purely diplomatic organization into a permanent military power with various countries merging it's forces into the UNSC military. The consequences of the wars led to the formation of a united government on Earth to lead the human race into the years to come at the beginning of the year 2170. The wars also served to point out the massive overpopulation problem along with the problematic food and resource distribution. The famines that were there in the past four year war along with the vast social problems revealed the need to change the political nature of governance on Earth and elsewhere, this system of governance also would later be used to govern the soon to be born colonies.

The events of the wars and the pressures they placed on the governments and populations also served to show the attraction and need to begin massive space colonization, a bill made by the United Earth Government in the year of 2310 to help ease the burdens on the already taxed Earth and it's own resources, however the colonization efforts didn't begin until the discovery of Slipspace and the invention of the Slipspace drive engine in the late 2200s by two scientists named Shaw and Fujikawa. The two had made the theory that the universe was in a seven non-visible infinitesimal quantum dimensions, making alternate physical laws exist and allowing for faster than light travel. The basic function of a Slipspace Drive was to use particle accelerators to rip small black holes into the normal space time to enter Slipspace, the magic of the program was how the engines manipulated the holes in order to squeeze through ships that were weighing thousands of tons into Slipspace, thus cutting the time needed for travel and shortening the distance between the stars , though travels between star system to star system was sometime inaccurate in terms of relative time that made it necessary for all UNSC ships to have cryo-tubes for it's crew for even short Slipspace jumps could take two months, while long jumps could take six months. With this discovery and the subsequent development of the Shaw-Fujikawa Translight Engine or the SFTE or known as the Slipspace drive—the human race could now colonize new worlds that were once out of reach as no ship in the past could leave the Sol System.

The colonization efforts had to wait for 52 years with the development of the first Slipspace drive equipped colony ship known as the Odyssey, and formation of what was known as the Inner Colonies was not completed until the 24th Century in the Orion Arm of the Milky Way, and the residents of the Inner Colonies symbolized the elite of the Human race in many senses including the best in the physical and mental traits of human beings. The apex of the UNSC's colonization efforts was reached in the year 2492 when Humanity now ruled over 800 worlds, with the Outer Colonies forming the main

resource node and these colonies provided the raw materials to fund and support the Inner Colonies that formed into the main economic and political block of the new emerging human empire.

During this period of colonization, the planet of Reach became the primary garrison world of the UNSC in the Epsilon Eridani sector, acting as the metaphorical doorstep to Earth's location. It was more than a garrison world as it was also the primary naval yard and training academy for the UNSC forces needed to police and protect the Outer Colonies, and to build the many colony ships and military warships as well—due to the massive and lucrative veins of titanium found on Reach, it naturally served as the training grounds for many of the covert and special forces units of the UNS, including the ODSs.

This boom didn't come without a cost as the vast difference between the two parts of the human empire gave rise to ideological and political causes that began to spread, resulting in many brush fire wars happening on the Outer Colonies resulting in some of the worlds going into open rebellion against the UNSC. These brush fire wars continued and while they were silenced by the might of the UNSC Navy and the UNSC Marine Corps, there was the threat of hundreds more getting ready to be spread all over the Colonies, analysts in the UNSC determined that by the year of 2517, in twenty years all out rebellion would occur and it would be uncontrollable, overwhelming, and massive. They realized that while they could contain it, using overwhelming retaliation would be a negative action due to unnecessary civilian casualties in open warfare, plus the negative public opinions and more on the UNSC would further the cause of rebellion in the Outer Colonies. Thus, in order to create a special counter insurgency force to deal with these insurrections before they grew, avert civil war, costly conventional solutions were avoided, and reduce or eliminate unnecessary civilian deaths, the UNSC decided to Spartan II program, the successor to the Orion Program begun in 2491.

The Orion Project or the first of the Spartan-super soldier project, thus named the Spartan-I Program was to test genetic enhancements on selected volunteers from the armed forces of the UNSC. The program had failed due to the high mortality rate of those selected for the injections. Those who did survive the injects had a high amount of mental problems later in life. It is unknown on how many soldiers had been part of the Orion Program, but it was known that several of the soldiers had children who would also possess the results of the genetic enhancements and they were selected to be part of the next program. The program however garnered enough positive support, consent, and funding to have a second phase program to begin, aptly named the Spartan-II Program.

The Spartan II Program began in the year 2492 under the leadership of Dr. Catherine Halsey of the UNSC's Office of Naval Intelligence known also as ONI and by Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez and AI Dã©jã of the UNSC military. The program began by finding children who possessed superior physical and mental attributes—at the year of 2517, at least 150 suitable candidates for the Spartan II program were found, but due to budget constraints, only half of the children were conscripted into the program—many of them were at the age of 5 to 7, they were kidnapped from their homes and replaced with Flash Clones to maintain the secrecy of the program.

They were taken to Reach and began their long years of training under the eyes of CPO Mendez, learning the use of weapons and vehicles in the UNSC arsenals, military tactics, strategy, team work, combat doctrine, hand to hand combat and more. To marginalize their civilian lives, their family names were discarded and replaced with serial numbers. In the seven years that passed the children were subjected to the newly upgraded medical enhancements that had it's roots in the first Spartan program. These augmentations would make them the truly unique Spartan super soldiers they were needed to be.

The augmentations were divided into five types.

Carbide ceramic ossification â€" advanced material made from a combination of special metals and ceramics made into layers that are grafted on the skeleton to make the bones virtually unbreakable. The coverage of the material had to not exceed to 3 percent of bone mass as the risk of white blood necrosis was high.

Muscular enhancement injections â€" protein complex is injected intramuscularly to increase tissue density and reduce lactase recovery time.

Catalytic thyroid implant â€" platinum pellet containing human growth hormone catalyst is implanted in the thyroid to boost both skeletal and muscular tissue growth. This is known to suppress the sexual drive.

Occipital capillary reversal â€" submergence and boosted blood vessel flow beneath the rods and cones of the subject's retina, this would result in a dramatic increase in the subject's perception.

Superconducting fabrication of neural dendrites â€" alteration of bio-electrical nerve transduction to shielded electronic transduction. The results included a three hundred percent increase in the subject's reflexes, and anecdotal evidence of high increase in intelligence, memory and creativity.

The procedures did not come without significant risks for the young soldiers in training, as there was a high fatality rate for the children. The first augmentation procedure had the risk of massive growth spurts in the children that could lead to irreparable massive bone pulverization. The second augmentation had the subjects suffer a 5 percent increase of a fatal cardiac volume increase. The third augmentation had a rare yet high risk of elephantiasis. The fourth augmentation had risks of retinal rejection and detachment, along with permanent blindness. And the fifth augmentation had a high risk of Fletcher's Syndrome and Parkinson's disease.

Out of the 75 Spartans who took the augmentations only 33 survived without complications and the risks mentioned and recovered well, 10 survived but had suffered the complications and risks and were no longer fit to be in combat and were relegated to tactical and administrative duties due to their still increased mental capabilities, the rest perished. After the funeral made for the Spartans who did not survive the augmentations, the surviving 33 continued to train after recovery and adapt to the augmentations.

The results of the augmentations on the Spartans were amazing as they

combined together to create unexplained and unexpected synergistic effects.

Spartans could run up to 55 KPH (34.155 MPH), one Spartan named Kelly-084 could run at a much higher speed of 62 KPH (38.502 MPH), these abilities were totally independent of any support.

They could lift three times their normal body weight due to increased muscular density and strength.

Virtual unaided night vision.

Reaction time of 20 milliseconds, but this time is in normal conditions, in combat, the numbers are far higher.

Capable of unprecedented teamwork and unit cohesion bordering on telepathy.

Unlike the first Spartans, the Spartan IIs had no physical or psychological problems.

All these results were seen in only a few months after their full recovery of the augmentation procedures. And their teacher CPO Mendez stated that they all would grow even better once they were fully accustomed to their augmentations, the only true one would be that the Spartans can exceed the speed of 55 KPH (34.155 MPH). All these abilities were totally independent of the coming Mjolnir Armor Series, and it's introduction to the Spartans' arsenal of tricks and equipment only boosted these unprecedented abilities.

One of the Spartans proved to be a cut above the rest, his name and serial number was John, John-117 born on the planet Eridanus 2 in the city of Elysium, with brown hair, freckles, and a gap between his two front teeth, and like all the Spartans, he was stronger, faster, smarter and tougher than the normal human being, a good indication was at the age of six, he was already larger and a foot taller than other children his age, he had been selected by both Dr. Catherine Halsey and a young Lieutenant Jacob Keyes after he had been seen to have phenomenal reflexes and accurately predicted the side of a coin that the doctor had flipped would land on, he however was not always a team player. Like all the Spartans, he had been assigned to work with a team, and his group comprised of two other Spartans, Kelly-084, and Sam-034. The training course that the three of them first traversed was a network of ropes, beams, and bridges to reach the top to ring a bell, the team that reached the top to ring the bell would be given a lavish meal, while the last team to ring would not eat dinner at all. John was not agreeable with the concept of team-work and left his two team-mates behind and rang the bell himself, Kelly and Sam came at later times to follow John.

However, CPO Franklin Mendez was not impressed and told the team that they had lost the competition, and explained the reason in simple words.

"\_You're team loses, you lose. You don't win until you're team wins.\_"

The night after, the rest of the Spartans ate lavishly while John, Kelly, and Sam ate nothing, but it became a lesson that the three young Spartans took to heart, John most of all and the next

dayâ€|.they as a team were the first to ring the bell. And it was the start of a long friendship between the three Spartans.

John's leadership talents came to the fore when in the Military Wilderness Training Preserve located in the Highland Mountains on Reach, he and his fellow Spartans were dropped off, their object was to reach the extraction point on the map and make it back to the base before night time. However, they only had a piece of the map with each of them and time was against them all. John-117 picked a rally point for the Spartans and in time they were able to rally and move as a cohesive unit under his leadership and spot the Pelican Drop-ship that was their ticket off the areaâ€|however it was guarded by Marines sent to act as the last obstacle to the ship. Using non lethal tactics, the Spartans were able to over-power the Marines and get to the Drop-ship, John stayed behind as long as he could to make sure than all the Spartans were in the Drop-ship. He then accepted responsibility for being the last of the Spartans to be on the ship and be punished for his actions. However, CPO Mendez had observed his actions and not only allowed him to continue his training, but make him the full squad leader of all the Spartans.

John was very much devastated by the deaths of his fellow Spartans, namely those who died when subjected to the augmentations and wondered at their funerals on if he truly spent their lives well and properly or did he waste them for nothing, it was those teachings from his trainer that stuck with himâ€|as he and the other Spartans considered Franklin Mendez as a leader and authority figure in their livesâ€|and most of allâ€| a father figure. And he and his comrades considered Dr. Catherine Halsey as close to a mother figure as she always looked out for their well being and even let them play simple games when they were not training, and despite their annoyance, she could tell them apart in the same way they could when wearing their armor.

The very first actual combat mission undertaken by the newly promoted Master Chief Petty Officer, John-117 was to deal with the Eridanus rebels in the Eridanus System, his home system, he and his fellow Spartans' object was to capture the traitor Colonel Robert Watts, leader of the rebels and after sneaking into the base, they succeeded in capturing the traitor with minimal losses on the side of the citizenry, and no losses on their strike team. John himself was slightly wounded and gained a Purple Heart for the mission.

However, all that changed as he and his fellow Spartans were debriefed in Reach by Admiral Michael Stanford and the AI Beowulf as they were now told to shift their prioritiesâ€|they were no longer a covert counter insurgency force dedicated to quelling insurrection and rebellion in the Outer Coloniesâ€|but to combat a new menaceâ€|one the UNSCâ€|and Humanity was not prepared or equipped to faceâ€|

The alien combine known as the Covenantâ€|

In the year of 2525, on October 7, a day that would live forever in UNSC history as the dawn of a brutal cycle of war, a UNSC battle-group arrived at the Human Colony World of Harvest in the Outer Coloniesâ€|the officers, crew, and soldiers of the battle group were stunned and horrified to find that the once lush world had been brutally destroyedâ€| it's very surface burned and charred into glass, all forms of life, animal, plant, and human were no longer on

scanners, it's biosphere wiped out, rendering the planet to lifelessness and unable to sustain life, and the cities in the colony were also reduced into nothing but rubble. They then detected a single ship of unknown but undeniably alien design hovering over the decimated world.

Before any form of communication was to be done to identify the unknown intruder, the single ship attacked the UNSC battle group, destroying all ships save for one badly damaged UNSC shipâ€|intercepted communications from the now designated enemy ship identified it's affiliation with the Covenant, a caste driven, theological organization comprising of several alien races. And in it was a message in perfect English that would become the phrase that would truly show the danger the UNSC and Humanity faced.

"\_You're destruction is the will of the Godsâ€|and we are their instrument.\_"

With thatâ€|the UNSC-Covenant War began...

A war that would last for 27 yearsâ€|

Out of all the 800 worlds colonized by the UNSC, over 260 of those worlds were invaded by the Covenant and those worlds were utterly obliterated, reduced into lifeless balls of glass by the orbital bombardments of the Covenant battle fleets, leaving only 540 worlds still in the rapidly declining grip of Humanity. The Covenant also proved successful in invading and devastating several Inner Colonies' worlds as well as smaller parts of the frontier, and even John-117's own home world of Eridanus II was destroyedâ€|utterly reduced to glass, the other worlds that fell included Jericho VII, and all the Outer Colonies were completely obliterated. And the assaults on the Inner Colonies began.

It was Humanity's darkest days, outnumbered and out gunned, by the vast horde before them, and unable to match the higher levels of technology of the aliens before them, their fleets were decimated by the armadas of the Covenant Fleets, forcing UNSC Fleets to go closer to the Inner Colonies to protect them and to defend Earth. Only when the battles took place on the planetary surface that the UNSC had the upper hand, relying on their time honed tactics, strategy, luck, and fire power to even up the odds, and though they had gained several key victoriesâ€|they suffered horrendous losses and were still losing ground.

The Marines and their special forces group, the Orbital Drop Shock Troopers were doing all that they could to stem the tide and halt the Covenantâ€|they were the best of the bestâ€|but they were still human and their casualties were highâ€|and no matter how many of the Covenant races they have killed in combat there were still more ready to fight.

However, the UNSC morale was kept high by the introduction of the Spartans, who now wore the signature Mjolnir Mark IV Armor that became their symbol. Deemed as the luckiest of the Spartans, John-117 was the very first to test the first manufactured suit of the Mjolnir Armor Mark IV and wore it in the 27 years of fighting the Covenant.

John-117 was also considered by Dr. Catherine to be the best

candidate to for the protection of the 'smart' AI Cortana, she had reasoned that while the Spartan leader was not the best in terms of strength, speed, or smarts as the others were better in those fields than him, he had equal measure in them all, being the most balanced of the Spartans, and also the bravest of them all, and was naturally the luckiest as wellâ€|due to surviving amazing odds that would have killed even the most reason UNSC soldier.

The introduction of the Mjolnir Armor Series started under the banner of ONI and Dr, Catherine Halsey, and had undergone changes and redesigns over the long years of it's developmentâ€|named after the legendary war hammer of the Norse God of Thunder, Wind and Rain Thor, The Mjolnir was both a defensive system and a weapon of war and it proved to be the hallmark symbol that was associated with the Spartans.

The first Mjolnir Mark I unit was the first of the UNSC Navy' attempts to created powered exoskeletons for combat use. The mark I battle suit was a bulky exoskeleton that improved the strength and stamina of the user. A user of the suit could lift at least 2 tons (4, 409 pounds) and could run at 32 KPH (19.88 MPH). The armor proved to be impervious to standard UNSC light weapons fire, and it's main weapon was a 30-millimeter mini-gun that could change it's munitions loads which were stun rounds for training and light rounds for combat missions. They could be fitted with sensors and infrared scopes, and it used a powerful hydraulic system with hydraulic fluid to move the suit. The suit consumed massive amounts of energy and had to rely on a fusion reactor in order to provide the needed power for it's operation through a large cableâ€|however this hindered movement and limited it's operational range. The lose of the either the cable, the reactor or both left the suit powerless and thus it was never seen in combat. However, it did see you in docking facilities and as mining units in Reach's titanium mines. The team under Dr. Halsey then scrapped the first design and rebuilt it from the top up. The Spartans themselves could out perform this version quite easily.

The second Mjolnir version had a more slimmed down profile but was still unsuitable for front line combat and therefore was not seen in battle service in the UNSC armed forces, regardless of that, it was still the toughest form of combat suit armor that the UNSC had in service.

The third Mjolnir version now had a more human form profile and did away with the cable and now relied on power from a power transmission-receiver so that power can be sent to the Mark III in the same fashion as power from planet borne generators was sent to the Orbital defense Platforms on UNSC held worlds. Despite the changes, the design was still dropped for two key reasons, the first was that despite the new changes to power supply, the suit still had a limited operational range as moving such a generator would be too expensive and unwieldy to move to different theatres of war, and the second was that if the generator was somehow destroyed, the users of the Mark II would be trapped in powered down worthless metal shells.

It was with the advancements of technology and design that the Mjolnir Series took a turn for the betterâ€|with the arrival of the Mark IV. The first attempts of making powered armor suits for front line service were failures, but under the increased funding to Dr Halsey, the Armor series changed as it took advantage of the many



technological leaps in the years that passed after the Mark I to Mark III were developed by the UNSC. The Mark IV was the first armor suit to fully conform to the human form and plugged directly to the soldier's nervous system through a basic Neural Interface implant, allowing the soldier's thoughts to control the suit's functions, namely the communications, environmental systems, hydrostatic gel levels, and more systems, and movements.

The Mark IV was also the first to utilize the newly created Reactive Metal Liquid Crystal that allowed locomotion. The Reactive Metal Liquid Crystal flawlessly boosted the power and speed of the wearer of the Mark IV Mjolnir Armor Suit, which was a big contrast to the Mark I, Mark II, and Mark III that relied on hydraulic motors to allow soldiers mobility, due to this development, the Mark IV took a far more human form and was more of a suit of human sized armor than a powered exoskeleton, in short terms, the soldier moved the suit, and the suit moved the soldier, allowing a very compact design than the original models.

However, the success of this version of the Mjolnir Armor was due to the parallel development of the Spartan II program which Dr. Halsey also handled. This was due to the fact that previous non-augmented UNSC Marines and personnel who attempted to use the suits were either killed or severely injured by the extreme reactivity of the suit. When the Spartans tried the suits on however, things turned around as the Spartans, due to their augmentations had the needed physical and mental prowess to handle the Mark IV's abilitiesâ€|further adding weight to the name of Mjolnir, for in legend, the war hammer could not be wielded by anyone except the one with the strongest mind and body.

The Mark IV had an integrated advanced computer system which could constantly monitor weapons, biological function, and motions from outside forces through a special motion sensor radar system built into the helmet in the HUDS (Heads Up Display).

The suit itself was designed for multiple combat environments on any planet and even in the deep vacuum of space itself as it was air-tight and hardened in vacuum. It was armed with built in air-filtration systems that allowed the Spartans who wore them a full 90 minutes worth supply of clean oxygen. The helmet also came equipped with a standard UNSC flashlight with a recharging fusion pack that was independent of the fusion pack that powered the Mark IV. It also had concealed compartments in the thigh plates to store grenades and ammunition.

The refractive luminous green titanium alloy plating that made up the outer shell of protection of the Mark IV was designed to fight the Covenant and their advanced plasma based weapons and more, allowing a Spartan soldier to withstand up to three times the plasma damage a UNSC Marine could manage with the use of standard Marine Combat Armorâ€|the alloy plates also provided basic protection from Human based projectile weaponsâ€|though only to a degree higher than the marine Combat Armor.

The other features of the Mark IV included built in recoil compensating actuators, hydrostatic gel which was used to control and regulate temperature and dampen impact force, and biofoam injectors and medical care systems. The biofoam injectors and medical care systems of the Mark IV however had to rely on an outside source of

the healing substance and the needed antibiotics, medicines, and stimulants to heal the user, namely from the standard UNSC Marine Medical kit as the Mark IV was not equipped to manufacture or store it's own supply.

One of the greatest flaws was that while powerful and nearly indestructible, the Mark IV didn't possess the shielding technology the Covenant had, and this left them vulnerable to overwhelming attacks from plasma weapons.

John-117 and his fellow Spartans fought with all that they had learned both on Reach and on the battle-fields and for the past 27 years, they all gave all that they had to keep the Covenant from winning over the UNSC utterly. He and his Spartans became the stuff of legend among both the UNSC military and the citizens of the UNSC held worlds. The stories of the Spartans winning victories over impossible odds against the mighty armies of the Covenant inspired the UNSC troopers to fight on and to resist the Covenant forces and kept the morale of the UNSC troops and citizens high in the years that passed.

This was a boon and a curse to the UNSC, a boon in the sense that it kept hope alive among the citizens and Marines who fought and resisted the Covenant and a curse to the UNSC's ONI branch as they had hoped to keep the Spartan IIs out of the public eye, but had to consent to allowing the Spartans to go public to boost the morale of the people. As such, the ONI did their best to regale the public and armed forces of the supposed invincibility of the Spartans to help inspire them to fight no matter what.

John-117 and his Spartans won countless awards for their actions in various battles over the course of the 27 years war with the Covenant, with John-117 now nicknamed Master Chief or Chief by the UNSC personnel, Marines, and Cortana who worked with him the most winning every military award in the UNSC, except the Prisoner of War medallion and fighting in over 207 combat engagements and had killed more than 1000 Covenant troops of the various races, and thousands more with his fellow Spartans. However, John-117 knew that despite the stories that were circulated around his fellow Spartans and himself he knew that he and his fellow Spartans who he treated as brothers and sisters were far from invulnerable.

During one operation to destroy a Covenant battle-ship over the planet Chi Ceti IV in the UNSC ship Commonwealth to enter the Damascus Testing Facility to retrieve the Mark IV Armor after moving to the Roosevelt Military base under the guise of a cover mission. However, before they could move out with the new suits to fight the Covenant a Covenant frigate came from Slipspace and attacked the Commonwealth with all the Spartans onboard it heavily damaging the ship and would have killed all their fellow Spartans and the crew had the three of them, himself, Kelly-084, and Sam-034 not taken off and took a Pelican to the hole in the ship caused by a MAC round and landed there. They were able to reach the ship's engine cores, but Sam saved his life by moving him out of the way from an overcharged plasma globule from a Jackal's Plasma Pistol. The bolt hit Sam and pierced through an area of his Mark IV suit that was not fully protected. He, Kelly, and Sam managed to leave behind several 'hot' ANVIL-II ASM missiles on the fusion generator of the ship, and their only means of escape was to leap into space having lost the Pelican to the Covenant however, while Kelly and himself could escape Sam

could notâ€¦as his suit was breached and if he attempted to leap into space, he would be killed by rapid decompression. John-117â€¦faced with the choices, the first, staying behind and dying with his friends, but depriving the UNSC of their support, and the second to leap into space with the rest of his friends and watch Sam be killed by decompression and to say that it was not easy was an understatement. Forced with a painful choiceâ€¦he decided to order Sam to remain behind to make sure that the warheads exploded. He had let a good friend dieâ€¦Sam was only 14 at the timeâ€¦and it would not be the last. Sam was the first Spartan to be truly Killed In Action.

He and his Spartans fought and gave their livesâ€¦their numbers dwindling, however, the Spartan MIA Protocol stopped them from telling the truth of the deaths of their fellow Spartansâ€¦as doing so would have severely depleted the morale of the UNSC. The wars progressed and despite the few yet significant tactical victories the UNSC had over the Covenant, the tide of war was still against themâ€¦until he and his fellow Spartans were recalled to Reach and were equipped with the new version of the Mjolnir Seriesâ€¦the Mark V.

The newly manufactured Mark V had hundreds of minor technical advancements but had two major defining ones that stood out against the Mark IV.

The first was a much larger fusion power pack, while this was making the Mark V a bit more bulky, it was for a good reason. The UNSC scientists, while unable to reverse engineer the highly advanced recharging shield system used on the armor of the Covenant's best warriors and leaders known the Elites, were able to reverse engineer the shield systems of the Jackals, the avian scouts of the Covenant who wielded shields on their forearm. This newly reversed shield technology proved to be a serious boon to the Spartans as it now allowed them a version of protection enjoyed by the Covenant Elites. The newly constructed shields provided protection from both solid and plasma based projectiles, but the process of stretching the Jackal shields to cover the whole human body had weakened itâ€¦leaving it weakened to UNSC based projectile weapons. Nevertheless it was a vast improvement.

The second was the installment was a special weave of memory processor super conducting material, the very material that made the core an AI system. This gave the Mark V the capacity of a ship borne AI, this along with the upgraded standard issue UNSC neural implant allowed an AI to inhabit the suit and the mind of the Spartan wearing it. This gave the Spartan wearing the Mark V the massive benefits of the AI's incredible information processing capabilities. Therefore the Ai would be able to assist the Spartan in real time by monitoring communications, computer information relays, and friendly combat updatesâ€¦along with informing the Spartan of threats that might even evade the senses of the Spartan.

Unlike the Mark IV, the Mark V had special magnetic pads that can not only hold weapons in selected areas on the suit such as the back, thighs, and beltâ€¦but could carry far deadlier ordinance for operations, such LOTUS Anti-Tank Mines and HAVOCK Tactical Nukes, just in case the Spartans would be ordered to take out vehicles, ships, or bases.

With these new suits, he and his Spartans were told of their new and very risky mission, their task was to hijack a Covenant battle-ship and if possible, kidnap a Prophet, the race that apparently were the overall religious and political leaders of the Covenant, this was to either halt the war or bargain for a truce with Cortana being assigned to serve as tech specialist and hacker for the operation. They were to be on a rejuvenated Halcyon-Class cruiser known as the Pillar of Autumn under the command of Captain Jacob Keyes, the very same Jacob Keyes who helped Dr. Catherine Halsey with the Spartan II Program and they had very little time to do so.

However, things didn't go well at all as barely two days had passed during their preparations when a massive Covenant battle-fleet appeared over Reach and laid siege to the planet. He and his Spartans did whatever they could possibly manage in order to keep Reach from being destroyed alongside the UNSC Marines, the ODSTs, and the Navy while the officers and the sector commander of Reach began to initiate the Cole Protocol.

The Cole Protocol was established after the battle between one of the Covenant's battle-fleets with a massive fleet led by Admiral Preston Cole the battle was horrific and casualties were high and while the UNSC fleet had won a significant victory, the casualties their forces had suffered made it very bitter.

Thus was the establishment of the Cole Protocol, which ordered all Commanders, AI, and high ranking officers to purge and destroy all databases pertaining to UNSC force deployments, weapons research, rally points, garrison-worlds and most important of all..the location of Earth. The second article in the Cole Protocol forbade any retreating UNSC ship to Slipspace towards the Inner Colonies and Earth, instead, they were ordered to make 'blind' Slipspace jumps in order to lead the Covenant away from Earth. The last article was the need to ensure that the destruction or capture of a ship borne AI by the Covenant was prevented at ALL costs. Any officer, regardless of rank or position who clashed with the Cole Protocol was to be charged with high treason and either imprisoned or executed.

The battle proved long and decisive as he and his Spartans worked two teams to ensure the survival of the people on Reach and to ensure that no trace of data could be found by the Covenant to locate Earth and wipe out the Human race. However, they all were losing ground fast as the battles progressed, however in space the UNSC Fleet were able to keep things in a stalemate, with the Orbital Defense Platforms and the Super MACs evening up the odds in the fight, but with losses on the UNSC side along with the Covenant.

When the Covenant Fleet pulled back, the UNSC thought that they had won, but the others in the command thought otherwise the leaders of the Covenant forces and fleets, the Elites were very honor bound and were not the kind to retreat from a fight, and their suspicions proved true as hundreds of Covenant boarding craft were detected and the Covenant Fleet came back in full force. Many more of his fellow Spartans were killed or he had lost contact with them as they tried as best they could until he and his friend Linda-058 who had been wounded but could be revived, along with Sergeant Avery J. Johnson, Private O'Brien, and Private Bisenti, and took off in the Pillar of Autumn, just as Reach was glassed by the Covenant and the order for all surviving forces in Reach to retreat. As before, he and the crew of the Pillar of Autumn made a blind jump but were pursued by several

ships including the ship known as the Ascendant Justice, which was the flagship of the Supreme Commander who led the attack on Reach.

It was at this very moment, that he and his fellow UNSC soldiers and officers found themselves in front of an unknown world and before them was a massive artificial ring that was of a design that none of them had ever seen before—but the Covenant forces that followed them and engaged them. He was awakened from cryo-sleep and then met up with Keyes to make the arrangements to land the Pillar of Autumn on the ring and get Cortana off the ship to prevent her capture or destruction—and like Dr. Halsey had requested, he was the one charged with this duty and did so as he and the Marines fought valiantly to repel the Covenant boarders that attacked them after the Covenant had destroyed the Fire Control System for the MAC cannon of the Pillar of Autumn. However, he and Cortana, like the rest of the crew were forced to abandon the ship and head for the surface under the order of Captain Keyes.

Once they were on the ring world, he and Cortana struggled out of the downed Bumblebee escape pod, salvaged what they could from the wreckage and the dead bodies of the marines who did not survive. He and Cortana then found pockets of other Marines and formed a resistance with the other survivors of the Pillar of Autumn, and when Cortana heard that Keyes and the other surviving command crew and their Marine escorts were captured by the Covenant, he and the ODSTs and Marines staged a rescue on the cruiser that held their comrades—the Truth and Reconciliation.

He led the ODSTs and Marine strike force that fought their way through the valley to the Truth and Reconciliation's anti-gravity lift with the use of a sniper rifle and assault rifle, gathering whatever supplies he could use along the way and taking the Covenant weapons that he might need and eliminating the forces that stood in his way, along with the supporting reinforcements of Marines and ODSTs that came in when they were needed. They managed to fight their way to the lift and ambush the Covenant and managed to slay even the Hunter pair that were sent down to stop them. Though casualties were considerable for the raiding force and the battles with the Elite Stealth forces and the Zealots, John-117 was able to free Captain Keyes and his escorts, there he told the Chief and Cortana what the ring world they were on was, it was known to the Covenant as Halo—and why the Covenant were far more concerned with it than them. They also realized that there was a chance that Halo was a weapon that could control the fate of the Universe, Captain Keyes then ordered him and Cortana to go to Control Room of Halo and prevent the Covenant from attempting to activate Halo and use it to destroy the human race. After fighting their way back to the bridge, where he had left behind his fellow Marines to guard the entrance, he found them all dead after eliminating the Stealth Elites that made the attack on the Marines—realizing from communications from the Pelican pilot Foehammer, that pick-up was impossible, they fought their way to the shuttle bay and commandeered a Spirit Drop-ship, they were nearly stopped by two Hunters, but the Captain rammed the arms of the Spirit, crushing the Hunters.

He and Cortana then led a strike force of Marines to secure the Silent Cartographer, the map room that led to the Control Room for Halo. They had to secure a beach head and fought with a strong Covenant garrison and landed right into a serious fire fight, they

managed to take the beach though casualties were considerable, thankfully reinforcements were present and they were able to fight their way to the Silent Cartographer, however, the Elites and their allies had further hardened the location and also sealed the doors which were very strong, forcing him and Cortana to find the Security Control Room to disable the lock-down.

He and Cortana had to deal with the Covenant security force outside of the building and the Hunter pair that guarded the outer courtyard/entrance and fought past the remaining garrison and fought with the next Hunter pair and the remaining Covenant Grunts, and Elites that guarded the Security Control Center, and the two of them deactivated the Security system and after dealing with several Stealth Elites, the Grunts, Jackals, and Elites inside the Map Room and the next groups of Hunters there. They were able to get to the Map Room and locate the Control Center for Halo and head off to intercept the Covenant under orders from Captain Keyes who had his own mission as well.

The two of them accomplished the very first aerial insertion from under-ground and fight their way to the Control center, rescuing as many UNSC Marine Fire Teams as they could, with the support of the Marines they were able to fight their way through most of the Covenant garrisons that dotted the area that lay between them and the Control Room, which was located in some sort of temple/shrine. They were able to defeat the massive Covenant garrison in the area and allowed the rescued Fire Teams the chance to return to Alpha Base to recover, rest, and heal while they went on ahead further defeating small to large pockets of Covenant resistance until they arrived at the temple and over powered the garrison there and accessed the Control Room, it was there that Cortana changed somewhat and accessed the data, identifying the structure as Forerunner artifact dubbed a Fortress world and it was to study something, something that horrified Cortana and the Covenant and she quickly ordered him to stop Captain Keyes from getting to the supposed Covenant Weapons cache that Cortana told him in a panic was not what they thought it was, but something far more horrible.

As soon as he arrived to the sight, he found a downed UNSC Pelican and a garbled transmission that cycled over and over saying that something had attacked them and had not been the Covenant, and Captain Keyes had been taken by the unknown hostiles. As he made his way through the swamp like lands, he encountered pockets of Covenant forces who were apparently frightened by something and when he arrived into the site and fought his way past the light resistance left over, he went down into the underground facility, he witnessed bloody sights as blood from the Covenant forces decorated the insides though why there were no bodies made him even more wary, he then found a UNSC Marine who seemed to have suffered massive mental break-down as the Marine screamed out in fear and fired at him with a pistol, he left the Marine alone and heard disturbing descriptions from the insane Marine about monsters attacking them, taking the live ones and how he avoided being taken by pretending to be dead, he heard the names of private Mendoza, Bisenti, Sergeant Johnson being uttered in agony, and how the Marine had seen them all dead and turned into monsters. He realized that there was no way he could help the soldier and as much as he hated to leave a man behind, he moved on and entered the area to find a UNSC Spoofer, and was about to access it when he heard strange sounds behind him almost like a creeping sound, he looked about with his weapon ready and finding

none, opened the door and caught a dead Marine—Mendoza in his arms, wasting little time, he made his way into the room and spotted the combat helmet of a UNSC Marine—their weapons were there as well, but their bodies were not there at all. He placed down Mendoza's own body and got the helmet that was worn by Private Wallace Jenkins, he couldn't help but feel even more saddened and managed to retrieve the Helmet Recorder's Recorder Chip and began accessing the data to find out what happened.

What he saw the indeed foreboding as he watched Sergeant Johnson, Mendoza, Bisenti, Dubbs, and Jenkins land and move out to the supposed Weapons cache. The rest of the squad held the entrance while the Sergeant and his team went in. There they found a brutally mangled and buttered Covenant force, blood all over the place. He listened to their conversations about the attack as Captain Keyes entered the scene. He then watched as the Marines, along with Captain Keyes enter this room and while they scanned around, something happened as the squad left behind in the top of the structure called in and reported that they were under attack and the attackers were not Covenant and the communication was cut with a bloody scream, Johnson was about to order Mendoza to head up there and find out what happened, but then they were all hearing sounds that forced them to get ready for a fight—and then the attack happened. He saw strange jelly fish like creatures burst through the doors en masse and attack the squads and he watched in shock as the Marines and Keyes were overwhelmed and killed—that was when the recording ended—he realized what happened and quickly fought off the incoming waves of the creatures that attacked him.

He then saw forms of creatures that resembled Elites, but were horribly mutated and distorted, along with Human forms that were also mutated and distorted horribly, he shot them down with his weapons, but had watched as the mutated beings got up and attacked once more—forcing him to use whatever methods, no matter how brutal to utterly destroy them. He watched as the creatures ripped through the Covenant forces and then tried his best to save several Marines but they too were killed by the creatures—who he saw could wield both UNSC weapons and Covenant weaponry. As he managed to find another way out of the facility he was able to contact survivors from the squads and with the call from Foehammer, they moved out to try and escape for pick-up at a large structure—they moved as fast as they could, but they were surrounded by the mutated forms of their former Human comrades, the Covenant Elites and the jelly fish like creatures, many of the Marines were killed and a few survivors were left and then from the structure came strange floating machines and before he could figure out just who these units were, he was teleported to the top and met a floating construct known as 343 Guilty Spark, who told him about the creatures known as the Flood and that the only way to stop the Flood from spreading was to activate Halo's systems, however, they would have to retrieve the Index, the key to activating Halo.

In the Library he would have to climb ten levels filled with the Flood's forces and Combat Forms, along with massive bloated forms known to him by the Construct as Carrier Forms, remains from what appeared to be Grunts and Jackals that exploded violently and released more of the Flood, namely the jelly fish like Infection Forms. He was told the function and the intelligence of the Flood despite their parasitic nature as they were already attempting to repair the Pillar of Autumn. He fought his through them holding his

position as the Forerunner machine opened the doors and guided his movements while being supported by the Sentinels, the same type of units that helped him before. As they reached the Index, they were able to avoid the Flood and teleport back to the Control Center.

It was there that he was told by Cortana the true purpose of Haloâ€|yes, it was a weapon to stop the Floodâ€|but not by killing them aloneâ€|but to starve them to death, and that was accomplished by wiping out ALL sentient life in the Universe. She took the Index and it was there that 343 confirmed Cortana's words and told him to give her to him so the Rings could be fired. Realizing his mistake, he refused and after defeating the Sentinels had to destroy Halo from being fired. They however had to deal with the Covenant and the Flood as both factions fought each other all over the Ring, as their commanders had ordered them to exterminate the Flood.

Cortana then told him that the only chance they had was to detonate the fusion reactors in the Pillar of Autumn and it would destroy the ring completely, yet they had to locate Captain Keyes to deactivate the safety locks that prevented them from doing so. Every UNSC ship's computer had fail-safes that not even smart AI like Cortana could override without the codes from a high ranking officer such as Captain Keyes, who could either say the codes, input them into a console, or use his neural implants.

But before they did so, they had to prevent 343 and his Sentinels from firing the Ring just in case they could manage without the Indexâ€|they retraced their steps and used any weapon and vehicle they could find to win the battle, but he had to commandeer the Banshees in order to reach his target destinations and he came close to getting killed and damaging his shields as Cortana rigged his shields to fire EMP pulses to disable the plasma pulse generators that powered Halo's transmission systems. After they succeeded, she was able to use the teleportation grid on Halo to reach Keyes in time.

They arrived as the Flood and the Covenant were fighting their absolute best to get into a Covenant cruiser, the Flood intended to repair the ship and move away from Halo, while the Covenant were there to eliminate the Flood and repair the ship for departureâ€|and Keyes was on that ship. Cortana managed to teleport them to the cruiser and they tried to find a way to the bridge where Keyes' was located, they knew what they had to do, despite orders given to them by Keyes to leave him, as he was being turned by the Flood. They had to abandon the cruiser when they were suddenly attacked by a massive wave of the Flood. They then had to fight their way to the Covenant ship's gravity lift and when they were in the ship had to fight through hordes of the Flood and the Covenant to reach the bridgeâ€|he and Cortana hoped to find Keyes aliveâ€|but they were too late as Keyes had been turned into a Brain Form by the Flood, and they were forced to kill him and retrieve the neural implants to get the codesâ€|then they had to fight through the Flood once more and the Covenant Spec Ops forces that arrived to commandeer a Banshee and make it to the Pillar of Autumn.

Once they arrived, they had to face more of the Flood and the Spec Ops Covenant that tried to reclaim the ship and prevent the Flood from using it to escape. He and Cortana made it to the bridge, and had set the Pillar of Autumn's reactors to detonate at 17 minutes, but then 343 came and deactivated the count-down and was about to



deactivate the fusion core. This then forced the two to improvise and remove the coolant rods to open the access shaft to the core. John-117 then used his grenades to cause the reactor to go critical while fighting through the numbers of Flood and Sentinels that tried to stop him and Cortana, along with a last ditch attack by the Covenant. He then took a Warthog and rushed through the ship to be picked up by Foehammer as Pelicans could be made space flight worthy, but before they could do anything, the Pelican was destroyed by Banshees and that forced him and Cortana to ride through the ship to reach one Long-sword fighter still docked in the Hanger Bay section and with only seconds to spare, they were able to make it while leaping over the massive trench below. He boarded the Long-sword and punched it's engines to full power, and as the ship exploded behind them, he and Cortana shut down the engines to cool them and watched as the ring was destroyed, she thought that it was over, but John-117 suspected it had only begun.

Later, they were able to gather survivors from the UNSC forces that managed to escape the destruction of Halo and he was stunned to see Sergeant Johnson still alive despite seeing him being among those attacked by the Flood and had come close to killing him until Cortana told the Spartan that Johnson was very much human. There he let the human Sergeant live and they then planned to take over a Covenant flagship to assure their escape. After doing several dangerous but very effective maneuvers to lure away several Seraph fighters, he and the small force infiltrated the Ascendant Justice, fought their way to the bridge and Cortana killed most of the Covenant crew when she was sent into the ship's core systems, using the confusion to their advantage, the group managed to escape and make their way out of the remains of Halo, the group argued on their next move, but he decided for them all to head off to Reach, since according to Cole Protocol, they were not to use a Covenant Ship to go to Earth as the ship would be tracked by the Covenant and they would reveal Earth's location directly, the second was that he wanted to find out what happened to his fellow Spartans.

He and the other UNSC forces then locate several cryo-tubes that apparently were jettisoned from the Pillar of Autumn, and found one of his fellow Spartans, Linda-058, while they used the Pelican, he stripped off parts of the drop-ship to reinforce a Spirit Drop-ship they would use to land in Reach, as he and Johnson watched their Pelican Drop-ship pilot Polaski train to pilot the Spirit, they soon arrive to see Reach glassed, and only a small Covenant fleet remaining in the area and a single spot was missed, the Fleet, comprising of at least three squadrons of Seraphs, a dozen cruisers, two assault carriers, naturally were confused as to why a flagship was in their location, and it was only when they hear an odd UNSC E-band distress call known as Oly Oly Oxen Free—none of the UNSC forces recognized it, with the exception of Master Chief as he knew that phrase and part of Spartan code, that he and his fellow Spartans had learned in their youth on Reach.

Though there was some debate as to whether they should go down, he and the others did so even when the cruisers surrounded their ship once Cortana determined a good landing zone, John-117 then said the code for the signal of Oly Oly Oxen Free with the order to find a safe spot to look for survivors, and he would be the first, just in case of a trap and to spring it himself, Haverson, the ONI attaché to the Pillar of Autumn followed him for support and they were able to meet up with one of the surviving Spartan IIs, Anton-044 who

deactivated his FOF tag to prevent Covenant attack, he led the others to the mines where they met the other surviving Spartans of Reach, Grace-093 and Li-008 who operated defense with a pair of chain guns bolted to boulders, John-117, Grace-093, and Anton-044 entered the base and found Vice Admiral Danforth Whitecomb who was working on the plans on the table for Camp Independence. The Vice Admiral then asked Master Chief exactly what he was doing here instead of leading the covert mission with Captain Keyes.

The Spartan squad leader informed them of the events in Halo and it was there that the rest of the party learned that the Admiral stayed behind to ensure the safety and activation of his new NOVA weapons, his Marine Company of Charlie Team was supposed to do that, but they were all killed and only Spartan Red Team helped him in the mission of arming the NOVA bombs and to give the Covenant headaches with hit and run tactical strikes, but the Spartans were trapped under CASTLE Base and they would soon be found by a Covenant force. The groups then rallied and took the drop-ship to the sight and rescue their comrades, and eliminated the Covenant force in the area trying to clear a cavern cave-in to enter the underground base. There, they met up with Kelly-087, Fred-104, and Will-043, all of them Spartans, Whitecomb asked if there were others, and Fred replied that there was one more, and it was Dr. Catherine Halsey who carried a fist sized crystal that she seemed to be what the Covenant had come to Reach forâ€|suddenly, they detected massive Covenant signals and then found themselves surrounded by literally thousands of Covenant troops, Grunts, Jackals, Elites, and several Hunter Pairs. The UNSC group tensed up and got ready for anythingâ€|then the Hunters roared and open firedâ€|and a split second later the Covenant forces attacked.

In space, Cortana had to guide the Ascendant Justice, under the Command Vice Admiral Whitecomb into Slipspace and out into a gas cloud to evade the Covenant who had found out about the fact that the Ascendant Justice was no longer on their side, with a dissected Covenant AI to help her and her tapping into the communications systems of the Covenant, Cortana realized that the Covenant had found Earth and that was the ultimate danger she now facedâ€|making her plan out a risky gambit to both free the others on the surface and escape the battle intact.

On the ground, the Covenant were actually shooting at the Hunters, as the lumbering but deadly warriors had disobeyed orders to take the crystal intact, and they risked it's destruction when in their anger they fired at the master Chief and the others around him, namely Dr. Halsey. The Covenant then converged on the group after dealing with the disobedient Hunters and it was when Whitecomb ordered Polaski to evac them, and they managed to escape towards the grav-lift, but the Covenant tried to force them back down while manipulating the grav-lift. Much to the shock of the others, the crystal changed shape and they were then sent upwards and were able to evac, but as soon as they arrived at the pick-up point, Cortana was no longer there.

It was then on the Ascendant Justice that Cortana had used the Engineers on the ship to combine both it and another UNSC Frigate, the Gettysburg, which was badly damaged but relatively intact and usable with the needed repairs as she needed at least two reactors for the deadly and risky maneuver she was about to attempt. And that was to attempt two Slipspace jumps, one into the Covenant Fleet to get to the others in the evac point, and to Slipspace outâ€|however

such a move was near to impossible to accomplish with only one reactor, and even the Covenant had not done such a thing, namely in the amount of time Cortana had to work with, thus she used the reactors of both the Ascendant Justice and the Gettysburg. As soon as she did so, she was able to evac the others and attempt the second Slipspace jumpâ€|however, it turned out that her gambit had dragged the entire Covenant Fleet with them and they were not in 'normal' Slipspace either. The Fleet fired at them, but the unique Slipspace made their plasma weapons miss the ship and fly around in a very erratic pattern, curving, looping, and even more amazinglyâ€|teleporting. During the fight however, a band of Elites who had escaped the purging of the Ascendant Justice made their move and caused an explosion to breach the hullâ€|further endangering the ship. The Spartans and Polaski made an effort to deal with both the Elites and fixing the hull breach, however, both Anton, Li, and Polaski were killed by a ship weapon based plasma bolt and Kelly badly wounded. However, Cortana was able to make the needed calculations and managed to escape the abnormal Slipspace they were while leaving the Covenant Fleet trapped.

John-117 was told by Dr. Halsey that despite the injuries Kelly had suffered she would live and it was then that she showed the Master Chief Sergeant Johnson's medical files and pointed out that due to his Boren's Syndrome, which he had gotten in a previous battle with the Covenant with heavy exposure to plasma energy, the Flood were unable to control and mutate him, explaining why he was still alive. She then gave the Master Chief two data crystals, one was the data on the Flood and the potential technology needed to eliminate and contain them, and the other had all that, plus the video from Jenkins' Recorder Chip and Johnson's medical files. She left the decision to him on which crystal to give to UNSC HIGHCOM, it was there that Halsey and Cortana discussed the artifact the Covenant had glassed Reach to find, it was powerful Forerunner artifact that could alter gravity, space, and even time itself, they realized that when Cortana had the combined Gettysburg-Ascendant Justice jump into Slip-space, the crystal had actually sent them through time.

They then arrived at the Eridanus Secundus asteroid belt and there, found the Eridanus Rebels and despite the fact that the rebels were enemies of the UNSC, they were able to force them to repair the ship as best they could. However, it didn't take long for the Covenant to show up as they tracked the radiation emitted by crystal once it was out of Slipspace, despite the damaged and malfunctioning plasma turrets on the ship, the crew of the G.A.J fought off the Covenant, to make up for the damaged magnetic coils on the ship that inhibited the plasma turrets on the Ascendant Justice, the Chief told Cortana to use the magnetic coils of the MAC gun on the Gettysburg to shape the plasma. It was then that Dr. Halsey, discovering very important files from her rival Colonel James Ackerson previously along with star-charts took Kelly on a special mission and left the crystal to Private Locklear to protect it, the Marine did just that and destroyed it to make sure the Covenant would never get it intact.

While the remaining crew of the G.A.J were able to gain several shards of the crystal after they were forced to retreat, leaving the rebels to be slaughtered, much to the regret of the Vice Admiral, they had other things in mind as they had to find a way of stopping the coming Covenant invasion of Earth, all they knew was that all ships of the massive Covenant invasion force was meeting on the

Covenant battle-station, the Unyielding Hierophant. The Master Chief then proposed a daring plan, and that was to infiltrate the station with a modified drop-ship and blow up the reactors, destroying both the station and most of the Fleet, and this was approved by the Vice Admiral, they did so with a special copy of Cortana and were able to infiltrate the station without incident.

But all that changed when they had to pass a temple complex and there they would fight the Brutes for the first time, John-117 grappled with his first Brute and barely made it, while Grace was killed by the Brute Shot, the favored weapon of the Brutes, and John-117 detonated the fusion pack of his fallen friend and that killed many Grunts, Elites as well as a few Brutes. They were able to reach the reactor cores and with the copy of Cortana rigged all 512 them to explode, but when they escaped the station, they found only the Gettysburg, and it was there that they learned the Whitecomb and Haverson had taken the Ascendant Justice and used the shards as a trap to lure more of the Fleet to the Unyielding Hierophant and with the detonation of the reactors on the battle station as the Gettysburg, which had been outfitted with the Slipspace engines of the Ascendant Justice, making it now the fastest ship in the UNSC Navy, with all the survivors, namely the four Spartans and Sergeant A.J Johnson left the scene. The destruction of the battle-station resulted in a massive blow to the assembling Covenant Fleet—wiping out over 488 of the 500 ships preparing to strike at Earth, reducing the numbers that would soon come to attack Earth itself, while severely damaging the same remainder, forcing them to seek out massive repairs.

It was the greatest UNSC raid in history and despite the short lived success, had severely damaged the Covenant War Fleet heading for Earth.

It was at the arrival in Cairo Station, main command center for the Earth Defense grid that the Master Chief donned the newly completed Mark VI Mjolnir Armor.

The Mark VI had several new features in the systems. Armed with an improved reactive metal liquid crystal layer for improved physical performance and enhancement, allowing him to move faster, jump higher and hit both harder and faster in hand to hand combat, along with increased physical strength. It was also streamlined to remove excess weight and while the armor was less bulky, they were thicker—offering much further protection for the Spartan wearing it. The protection was boosted even further than before with a new and better improved shielding system that was far stronger and more resilient, and could recharge at a much faster rate.

The data transmission relays installed into the Mark VI and connected to the memory-processor super conducting material weave that was also upgraded, allowed Cortana to be transmitted into any system with just a touch, it also had increased pressure limits for the hydrostatic gel layer, further improving the performance and increasing the damage tolerance of the Mark VI in falls and could do so instantly and has a lockdown mode to harden the gel in case of heavy trauma impact to lessen injury to the wearer, the suit also had special off hand data sensors to allow the wielding of two weapons simultaneously. And it had a special built in factory of biofoam and medical supplies—thus the suit could treat minor to moderate wounds, keeping the Spartan in the field for longer periods of time,

boosting the combat effectiveness of the Spartans, though critical injuries required greater medical assistance and support.

However, there was only one Mark VI due to budget restrictions and the Master Chief got to wear it, after it had been tested by one of their retired Spartan comrades, Maria-062 who lived on Earth. It was there also on Cairo station that the Master Chief and Sergeant Johnson were awarded the Colonial Cross for their heroic deeds, while Miranda Keyes accepted the Colonial Cross for her father. Then the First Battle began as the Covenant Fleet appeared and began to strike at the UNSC Defense Grid with only 15 ships, these, while powerful in their own right, puzzled the UNSC HIGHCOM as to why the Covenant would send a fleet that was small compared to the Fleet that attacked Reach. Hundreds of Covenant boarding craft were launched as the shooting match between the UNSC Earth Defense Force and the Covenant Fleet went at full tilt.

The Master Chief fought alongside the UNSC Marines who were the defenders of the Cairo station and he and his forces were able to hold the fort, killing the Covenant forces for every marine they killed, until the Covenant had left bombs in the Super MAC Platforms of the Athens and Malta, destroying both stations and opening a gap in the defense grid, this meant a bomb was in the Cairo as well, namely in the Fire Control Center.

The Master Chief fought his way through the Covenant in the area and out through the airlock and he entered the Fire Control Center and killed the Elites guarding the anti-matter bomb. He then heard that one of the assault carriers the Covenant had was no longer shielded but the UNSC had no ships powerful enough to take on the behemoth, until he asked to give the Covenant back their bomb, which he was allowed to by Fleet Admiral Terrance Hood. He then made it to an airlock and opened it, he then grabbed the bomb and guided it towards the Covenant assault carrier and he was shielded by the AI of a damaged UNSC ship and several Long-sword fighters cleared the way and he was able to reactivate the anti-matter bomb deep in the engine core of the ship and leap out as the ship exploded behind him, he then landed on the hull of the In Amber Clad and then headed off to the surface to intercept the Covenant forces that landed in the African city of New Mombasa.

There, they realized that the Prophet of Regret was in the Covenant ship and he and the rest of the Marines and ODSTs were ordered to find and capture the Prophet and find out what exactly he was doing here on Earth and in New Mombasa of all places. The Pelican he was in was then shot down by a Scarab Walker, and had to hunker down for extraction. The UNSC then began to counter attack and the Master Chief fought in every corner of the city with the Marines and ODSTs to make sure that the Covenant were not victorious in New and Old Mombasa, from the streets, to the buildings, and the sewers, while Johnson coordinated armor and troop reinforcements. He also made sure to rescue and reinforce trapped UNSC Marine forces in the area, including ODSST Marine Sergeant Peter Stacker's forces in Hotel Zanzibar. The Master Chief then was ordered to try and hunt down the Scarab before it did massive damage to the city and UNSC forces, including the 405th Marine Division out of Diego Garcia, they too are rescued by the Spartan with the 105th ODST Helljumper and hold the city square to break the Covenant offensive and they were able to hunt down the Scarab once it was trapped physically and

could not escape, there, he slew the pilots and their leader and destroyed the Scarab.

However, he and the rest of the troops, including Sergeant Major Johnson had to make it back into the In Amber Clad as the Covenant ship entered Slipspace right in the city of New Mombasa itself, the city was obliterated, but they were not going to give up and let the Prophet of Regret escape now.

There, they discovered another Halo, and realizing that the scenario they each had faced in the past Halo Ring and what dangers it represented, The Master Chief, Johnson and Cortana worked out the ground assault plan to hunt down the Prophet of Regret before he had the Index in his hands to activate Halo and he led the strike with members of the ODSTs and they all hit the beach within Human Entry Vehicles, while being supported by reinforcements and vehicle support. Commander Keyes and Johnson then led the attack to get the Index, while he dealt with the Prophet of Regret. As he fought his way to the temple where the Prophet had his sermon, he then faced off with the Honor Guard Elites and slaughtered many of them in combat and then managed to slay the Prophet despite his hidden arsenal of weapons.

However, he and Cortana had to evac as quickly as they could as the entire Covenant Fleet appeared with the Covenant Capital City of High Clarity. The Covenant then fired a massive plasma beam that obliterated the temple and sent him into the water, there he was found by the leader of the Flood—the Gravemind.

There, he was able to meet the Covenant's version of him, the Arbiter as they both faced the Gravemind, the full scale symbolic leader of the Flood who then told them of the activation of Halo, and there, he tried to convince the Arbiter of the mistake the Prophets were going to make if they activated Halo, along with the words of both the Monitor of Delta Halo and the newly assimilated Prophet of Regret.

Afterwards, he was able to be teleported to High Clarity as the Flood began to attack the city—just as the Elites and Brutes began to fight each other in the Covenant Civil War. He managed to free a good number of UNSC Marine captives, he was to hunt down and kill the Prophet of Truth, but the Prophet escaped in a Forerunner ship and he was forced to abandon Cortana, but not without promising her that he would come back for her.

He then returned to Earth and attempted to take out Truth, but was captured by the Covenant Loyalists and was about to be interrogated, but he was able to resist and fight his way to freedom and killed many of his foes, before the Prophet once more escaped his grasp—forcing him to escape as well into the jungles of East Africa.

There, he was rescued by Johnson and his Marines and was uneasy with the new alliance between the UNSC and the Elites, he was still not trusting of the Arbiter. But they worked well together as they headed to the river for evac, recovering whatever UNSC supplies they could and rescuing as many scattered Marines as they could.

The two former enemies then worked together and freed the Marines from a Covenant Base and then met up with Commander Miranda Keyes and

outlined the plan to enter the occupied city of Voi to take out a section of the Prophet's anti air defenses, but they were forced to evacuate the base when the Prophet of Truth broke through the communication system and the base was soon attacked by the Brutes as he and the strong marines held the line as Johnson and the Arbiter defended the Operations center to ensure full evacuation of the wounded. Though the base fell, he made sure that the Brutes and their allies paid dearly for every marine they killed.

Later, he and the Marines rallied to strike at the Brute blockades and broke through them and began to attack the city of Voi which was held by the Brutes and were supported by their fellow Marines, ODSs and vehicles, they were also able to combine their attack efforts on Mongoose ATVs to attack the Scarab Walker that the Brutes tried to use. The Master Chief and his fellow Marines destroyed the Scarab and watched as the UNSC ships and fighters appeared to attack the Prophet's ship but the Forerunner structure was activated and it seemed that they were too late—however, it did not activate the Halo Rings, but opened a massive and yet very stable and advanced Slipspace portal, before they could weigh their options to pursue the Prophet, the Flood came in one of their infested Covenant ships and landed in Voi—forcing the UNSC and their forces, including the Master Chief and the Arbiter to fight them all off before the Flood could infest and conquer the Earth. They were able to stem the tide until the arrival of the Elite Fleets that quickly glassed the area to sterilize and kill the Flood, with the forces they managed to assemble, they had to hunt down the Prophet and stop this madness once and for all.

They then arrived at the Ark and found it to be far beyond the Milky Way and there, they saw that the only way to the Control Room of the massive Ark was through a shield that they all, the ODSs and the Spec Ops had to break through by taking out the shield complex that was heavily guarded by the Brutes and their forces. Once the complex was down, they mounted a last strike on the Control Complex to stop the Prophet from completing his goal with the Sergeant Major in his hands.

It was there that Commander Miranda Keyes met her death by the hands of the Prophet as he attacked her from behind with a Spiker. It was there that the Flood assisted both the Master Chief and the Arbiter one last time, allowing the Elite to gain his revenge by slaying the Prophet. But the Flood then betrayed them and took over the Ark as it had come into the battle-zone with the infested High Clarity. Though they were able to fight their way through the battle-zone with the aid of none other 343 Guilty Spark, they knew that they had to end this threat once and for all, and they learned of a new Halo being built which while incomplete could be primed and ready to fire when they got the Index—but since the installation was the same as the one that Master Chief had destroyed, only the Index from the original was compatible, and the Spartan knew who had it—

Cortana—who he had been forced leave behind in the now infested Covenant City.

Without hesitation, he and the Arbiter launched a man strike into the City, slaying the Flood Forms that tried to stop them and he moved on until he found Cortana and freed her from the control of the Gravemind and with that complete, he, the Arbiter and the AI construct detonated the reactors of In Amber Clad, destroying High

Clarity, hoping to finally kill the Gravemind. However, they later learned that the Gravemind was now infesting the new ring and they had to fight their way to another control complex.

The Spartan and the Arbiter held the line as the Sergeant major walked with Cortana to activate the ringâ€|however, they were betrayed by 343 when it went mad at the mention of the destruction of both the Ark and the new Halo Ring. The Arbiter was unable to help, and despite his regenerative abilities, the UNSC Sergeant Major was mortally wounded by the upgraded Sentinel laser that the Forerunner construct had. The Spartan was able to defeat the deranged construct with the aid of Johnson and with the renegade deadâ€|the Spartan bade farewell to his longtime friend and promised to honor his order to never let Cortana go ever again. With thatâ€|both he and Cortana activated Halo.

The trio then rushed on the Warthog as fast as they could back to the Frigate and barely made it to safety and took off in the ship from Halo and the Ark to the Slipspace portalâ€|but the portal closed and only a portion of the ship made it back to Earthâ€|

But it was truly the end of the war as of March 3 2553, the UNSC and the Covenant Separatists declared a victory. A memorial on a barren hill was held for all those who died in the final battle including Miranda Keyes, and A.J Johnson, along with all the ODSTs and Marines who followed them. It was there that the alliance between the Elite and the UNSC did not end but was assured. The Arbiter and Lord Terrance Hood shook hands as despite the Fleet Admiral saying that he would never forgive him and his kind for beginning this war, he was happy that the Arbiter was with him to his last days, stating that the Master Chief had died, and Cortana was deemed lost as well.

The end of the UNSC-Covenant War was celebrated in very Inner Colony world and on Earthâ€|and in time, Humanity began to rebuildâ€|but it's heroes were never to be forgotten.

June 12, 2558â€|Earthâ€|

UNSC Fleet Admiral 'Lord' Terrance Hood looked over at the incoming reports that told him of the sighting of more UNSC ships that carried many civilians and refugees from the colony planets that had been glassed by the Covenant and then by the Covenant Loyalists. It was a hard five years since the end of the UNSC-Covenant War in March 3 2553, and things were still getting organized. The Inner Colonies were intact, but were quite the mess, and the Outer Colonies were lost completelyâ€|almost all those worlds were no longer habitableâ€|and with the newly arriving refugees, it would make things worse.

He looked over the data and walked over to the windows to look at the city of Sydney, Australia, the heart of the UNSC HIGHCOM, he sighed as the newly completed Museum of Humanity was ready for the opening. He was the guest speaker after all and he knew that he was going to have to go there. Despite the fact he still had tones of work to do, he had to do this occasion as well, but instead of getting angry, the current head of the UNSC accepted itâ€|today was a very important moment in the history of the Human Race, and the UNSC and the museum would be the symbol of it.

The Museum of Humanity was established with the blessings of the



United Earth Government, the Inner Colonies, and the survivors of the Outer Colonies and it would commemorate not the victories in battles, the defense of a nation or nations, or conquest of other nations—but the enduring survival of their species. They truly had been pushed to the brink of Extinction and countless billions of their fellow Humans, civilian and soldier alike had died in the defense of their civilization, they had faced the Covenant who had destroyed their colonies and killed their people, and yet had survived, though barely, and then the battles with the vile and horrific Flood.

The aged Admiral was happy that his race had survived those bloody and nightmarish 30 years of war, and despite his oath to never forget or forgive the Elites for their part in the War before they separated from the Covenant, he was thankful that they did and helped them push the Covenant back. Though many of the survivors of the Outer Colonies wanted blood for their destroyed worlds, he was not going to have another war spring up between them and their allies all for the sake of revenge.

The Museum had all the needed relics and artifacts to fill it. There were replicas of the real life UNSC weapons that their Marines, Naval personnel, Army, and the ODSTs used, even their vehicles and armor were also there as well. And the weapons left behind by the Covenant Loyalists were there as well. This Museum also had the life-like statues of every hero who had fought, bled, and died in the 30 years of fighting.

There were statues of heroes such as the heroic Captain Jacob Keyes, the leader of the Pillar of Autumn, who even when being converted by the Flood refused to surrender and give them the location Earth, even if it meant his death, his daughter Commander Miranda Keyes, the toughest female officer in the Fleet who helped prevent the firing of Delta Halo with the aid of the Arbiter and Sergeant Major A J Johnson, a statue of the deceased Admiral Whitecomb, whose sacrifice destroyed not only the Unyielding Hierophant, but a vast portion of the Covenant invasion force, there was also a statue of the said Sergeant Major who had fought against great odds alongside his comrades and allowed the firing of Halo to finally kill the Flood well away from killing all sentient life, and finally—Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan John-117, the greatest of his kin and had done many feats that even the most seasoned of the UNSC Marines and ODSTs found to be near to impossible to pull off. There were other statues as well of those who gave their lives in the battle with the Spartan's statue in the forefront

He himself had great respect for the Master Chief and his fellow Spartans, not just because of their records and abilities—but he owed them their lives as they had saved him and his staff on more than one occasion.

A part of him still couldn't help but wonder if the Chief was truly dead, due to the Arbiter's words years before. Though he admitted that he didn't want to think that the Master Chief was truly gone, there had been no reports from the still active UNSC Prowlers of any sighting of the section of the Frigate 'Forward Unto Dawn' that the Master Chief, Cortana, and the Arbiter had been onboard of when they had fled the destruction of Halo, the Ark, High Clarity and the death of the Flood. As much as he wanted to believe that there was a chance that the Master Chief was still alive along with Cortana, but

considering all that was before them and the possibility that they could anywhere in space, especially uncharted space made the idea of the being found alive all the more uncertain.

"Lord Hood, you're car has arrived to pick you up."

The Admiral's new AI assistant, Churchill appeared in the holo-tank to inform his commander that the transportation he requested to take him to the opening of the Museum.

"Thank you Churchill, have all the reports and data arranged for me to look up once the ceremony is over."

"Yes Admiral."

Laterâ€

Lord Hood stood in front of the podium as he looked at the large collections of people before him as the Museum was now soon to open. All over the area were large numbers of people, camera bots, and in front of the crowds were three large columns of veterans of the UNSC armed forces, Marines, ODSTs, Army and Navy personnel, both young and old. They wanted to be the very first to enter the Museum and to recall what they had been in since the beginning to the end of the war.

The UNSC HIGHCOM allowed access to civilian contractors on the combat data and recordings, along with weapon and vehicle designs, along with the city plans of both New Mombasa and Voi to make every detail of the battles as perfect as possibleâ€only the veterans were the ones who knew far more intimate details of the battles.

As soon as everything was ready, he began to look at the all the assembled people and spoke to them all in a voice as strong as he could muster.

"For countless years since the dawn of our raceâ€we have made monuments to commemorate our heroes, and the defense of nations or conquest of others. It has been part of our culture and heritage. Today however, for the first time in our history we are here to bless and open a monument not dedicated to those thingsâ€but to the enduring survival of a speciesâ€ours."

"Nearly 35 years ago, we were invaded by the collection of races we knew then and now as the Covenant, and we had been pushed to the brink of extinction, and we were then faced by the arrival of the Flood. We were out gunned and out numbered, our fleets defeated many times, and our ground forces losing many of our fellow soldiers, and yet we fought on, until on March 3, 2553, we won a major victory along with our Covenant Separatist allies over the Covenant Loyalists and the Flood, and while we still have many years to rebuild our shattered civilization, we now have something that all of us in our hearts wished to have ever since the beginning of this warâ€peace."

"This museum also commemorates not just our survivalâ€but to commemorate those who gave their lives willingly and honorably to make this peace possible. They who gave their lives with courage and fortitude in those days to the end of the war. For those of you enter these doors, I bid you welcomeâ€to the Museum of

Humanity."

Light-years away on the Elite Home-world of Sangheliosâ€|

"Arbiter, we have received word that the Humans have completed thatâ€|'Museum' of theirs. It had taken them some time but it is done."

A single Elite, dressed in the ornate and functional golden Arbiter Holy Armor faced another Elite who wore the golden armor of the Ship Master of the Covenant Navy. The Arbiter looked at his old friend Rtas' Vadum, or half Jaw as he was known to the UNSC soldiers, as he showed the images of the newly finished museum on the human home world of Earth.

The two Sangheili watched as Fleet Admiral 'Lord' Terrance Hood spoke about the long history and the commemoration of the Museum of Humanity and both listened well to the words of the supreme leader of their former enemies and now allies the UNSC, as he recounted the events that led to the construction of the Museum, commemorating the survival of the Human race, and both Elites nodded as the tours began and several older menâ€|UNSC Marine veterans who survived the battles with them and the Covenant Loyalists.

Rtas then turned to his friend and now supreme leader and spoke.

"They deserve to have that place made, they have earned it well."

"True my friendâ€|"

"To think that nearly 30 years agoâ€|we all considered them weak and inferior, with those thoughts we waged war with them and while we had nearly defeated them, they had proven to us that they were our equals for all the many battles we have with them. The Humans may be weak and not as advanced, but they are brave, tenacious, gifted with tactical and strategic brilliance, and honorable, all these qualities and their fighting spirit were enough to make them rival us and become our equals. They were truly worthy of the Forerunners' generosity and protection, as were we allâ€|to think that we had been fighting them for no reason and nearly wiping them outâ€| all for the sake of those deceitful and foolish Prophets and walking straight to our own deaths blindlyâ€|it shames me to think of it all now."

The Arbiter nodded silently as he knew the truth in the words of his friend. He knew that in the beginning of the war with the UNSCâ€| his people, when they were still on the side of the Prophets, saw humans as weak and inferior and were to be destroyed like the vile affronts to the Gods of their faith the Prophets told them to be without mercy or pity. And they did so with their faith, their former blind, and misguided faith, guiding them as they killed the human soldiers, civilians, their fleets, and glassed their worldsâ€|he himself held most of those attacks. And when they thought that they would be able to win the ground wars, they attackedâ€|expecting quick victories over the UNSC Marines, ODSTs, and Army on the ground.

But the humans proved them all wrongâ€|there on the ground, their victories were more uncertain, as despite the staggering casualties they had inflicted on the humans, the humans fought back with

impressive tactical and strategic brilliance, and an unwavering bravery and resolve that slowly and surely began to gain their attention.

In the past 27 years of combat, his people, while still hating the humans as they were their enemies, began to respect and admire them. The humans were indeed physically weak, but they were indeed tenacious as several of his fellow Elite commanders would comment on the fact that even the smallest of the humans would charge at their defenses with unwavering honor, and it made them state that they wished that the Unggoy (The Grunts as they were known in the Human tongue) were as committed and dedicated as the UNSC Marines in combat.

There were even stories from other Elites who said that even when about to die, wounded and dying human Marines would not beg for their lives and would fight still until they diedâ€¦defiant to the end. Though not all humans were like thatâ€¦the majority of the UNSC Marines were truly defiant even to the very end, preferring to die fighting than to be captured alive.

Even their lower ranking brethren commented that while the UNSC weapons technology was inferior, limited, and primitive, some of the technology was surprisingly useful and deadly in the hands of the UNSC ground forces, and their battle strategies and tactics were very impressive and effective. And it was even said that some of their kin had wondered on why the Prophets had not given Humans the option of honorable submission and absorption into the Covenant. Ever since the war's beginning, the Prophets had never told them of the crime that Humans had committed to warrant their extinction, and that was before the destruction of Halo, but even then, there were others who questioned the so called crimes of Humans and asked why the Prophets still do not welcome the Humans into the Covenant for they have more than merited their place to be part of the Covenant for having survived this long against them.

They also commented on the Spartans, namely the one who destroyed Halo and how he defeated legions of their comrades and fellow Covenant members in every battle he has been in, though they killed some of these Spartans, and dwindled their numbers, the Elites state that they are like a new class of Human soldier and how the Spartans were like themâ€¦being able to inspire discipline, bravery and ferocity in their fellow humans with their fighting prowess and their presence on the battle-field.

And nowâ€¦after all that has happened, he admitted that things had changed for their race and that of the Humans.

Rtas then looked at the Human Marines who saluted the statue and began to look at what they had seen and experienced in the wars, and civilians were there as well, and the Elite Ship Master saw the emotions that were there on the faces and eyes of the Humans. He then looked at the Arbiter and asked a question that had bothered him for some time.

"Do you think they will one day forgive us Arbiter? For all the lives we have destroyed and the worlds we have reduced to glass, because of our blindness to the lies the Prophets have shown us?"

The Arbiter shook his head at that statement.

"I do not think soâ€¦it is not easy for them to forgive, or to forget us for our attacks on them, and we cannot blame them for that, thankfully no such thing has happened yet that would spark a war between us and the Humansâ€¦and I would like it to remain that way. They are now our allies andâ€¦friends, and we may at least do our best to heal those wounds we have caused to their worlds and their kind."

Rtas then looked at the statue of one being in the UNSC who proved to be one worthy of attention, a former mortal enemy and turned valued ally. He recalled how much he had hoped to end the threat the Spartan had been to the Covenant in the past, before he was told the truth about what the supposed sacred rings wereâ€¦now that he knew that the Spartan was right in the fact that they had to be destroyedâ€¦his anger began to lessen, and knowing that the Spartan had been lost in the destruction of the vile parasitic Flood and their evil leader the Gravemind, his opinion on the Spartan had changed a great deal, and he saw the former enemy as the best symbol of the fighting spirit, tenacity, and resolve of the Humans, along with the UNSC Marinesâ€¦

It was a great shame that one of his caliber had died, but he died with honor and in the defense of his peopleâ€¦still it was not easy to know that one as great as he was no longer among them in this universe.

"It is hard to believe thatâ€¦the Spartan is dead, he truly deserves to be among the remembered for all he has accomplished."

"Were it so easyâ€¦"

Rtas was a bit surprised at that statement and looked at the Arbiter as they walked towards the terrace and looked at their city to see their world in the process of being rebuilt and their kin who now walked in peace. The Sangheili had lost many in the Wars and though some of his kin were still angry towards the Humans of the UNSC, namely for the NOVA bomb incident, many of them were no longer listening to the lies of the Prophets and there was indeed a movement of their youth who admired the audacity and fighting spirit of the Humans. The Arbiter saw them as the new future for his people and encouraged it. The UNSC and his people had an alliance and he intended to keep it strong in these days of rebuilding for both their cultures and civilizations.

"You do not believe that the Spartan is truly dead Arbiter?"

The Arbiter turned and looked at the statue dedicated to the Spartan. He recalled long ago that he had once carried a hatred for the Spartan, after all, during his days when he still served the Prophets, he had been stripped of his rank and title and the Mark of Shame placed on him due to his failure in stopping the Spartan from destroying it. He became the Arbiter afterwards and first began to doubt the Prophets when he had killed the Heretic Leader, who gave him clues as to what was going to really happen once the Rings were fired, and met the Oracle, 343 Guilty Spark.

He then helped retrieve the Sacred Icon to activate Delta Halo when he and his forces came to it and he yet again felt anger at the Spartan when he learned that the Prophet of Regret had been slain by

the Spartan. This led to the removal of his brethren from their position as the Honor Guards of the Prophets, and when he had retrieved the Sacred Icon after killing the Flood that infested the placeâ€|he found himself betrayed by both the Prophets and the Brutes, namely by their Chieftain Tartarus, and while he was supposed to die, he was rescued and fooled by Gravemind and found himself facing the Spartan himself, he challenged the Gravemind and disagreed when the Spartan told him about Halo's true purpose. It was when the Gravemind told him the whole truthâ€|it was then that he truly saw through the lies of the Prophets.

He allied with both the Gravemind and the Spartan to stop Halo from being fired and while the Spartan went to High Clarity to stop the Brutes, he also made his way to the Control center to prevent the Brute Chieftain from arriving there with his prisoners, Commander Miranda Keyes and Sergeant Major Johnson to use them to activate the Ring. He rescued as many of his brethren as he could, sparing them death from the hands of the traitorous Brutes who had murdered their leader with the blessing of the Prophets and met up with Rtas and helped rally his kin, until he and the human Sergeant fought their way to the Control Room to stop it. However, they arrived too late as Tartarus had now the Index, Keyes and 343 with him. He tried to convince the Brute Chieftain that the Prophets had lied to them all and there would be no salvation for them if Halo was activated, only death, but even his words and the data provided by 343 were not enough to convince Tartarus to stop and the Ring was activated. He and his Elites, with the support of the Sergeant Major managed to overpower Tartarus and slay him and his Brutes, though the Chieftain killed many of his kin, with the death of Tartarus, the human female Commander was able to recover the Index and stop the detonation, while his kin held the perimeter. But they had to rally and stop the Prophets and their Brute followers, along with whoever among the Covenant who sided with them from finding the Ark, the one place where all the rings could be fired once they were on standby firing mode. This made him come forward to the UNSC HIGHCOM and tell them that they were now Separatists from the Covenant and told them of what he had learnedâ€|and despite the reluctance of his kin, they aligned with the UNSC to prevent their former comrades, the Prophets and their Brute followers from finding the Ark and firing all the Halo Ringsâ€|ushering the death of all life in the Universe.

He recalled meeting the Spartan again and how he had been threatened by the green armored warrior with a pistol. After the Sergeant convince the Spartan to let him go, he and the others fought to evacuate from the area, but the Brutes and their allies were there and wasted little time in preventing their escape and Johnson and his Marines were taken hostage. There, he and the Spartan fought together and were able to free the captured Marines and were able to arrive in the hidden outpost. There he heard Marines comment on the arrival of the Spartan and say they were going to be all right, making him see just how much the Spartan meant to his fellow Humans as a symbol of hope and courageâ€|lessening his anger towards the warrior.

The Prophet of Truth then interrupted their communications with Lord Hood and that was a sign of an incoming attack, he and the Sergeant defended the operations center as the wounded were evacuated and they were getting ready to leave, but was separated from the Spartan as the base was destroyed. He then recalled watching and lending support to the Spartan and Marines as they punched through the Brute blockade forces and into the city of Voi, and their defeat of a Scarab in the

area where the artifact that the Prophet of Truth had been digging for was found. Their forces attacked the Prophet's ship and tried to destroy him at lastâ€|but the Prophet and his Brutes had escaped through a massive Slipspace portal, they then had to face the Flood as one of the Covenant ships the parasites had infested landed in the city. He and the Spartan rallied their forces and fought to reach the reactors of the ship to destroy the Flood and prevent them from spreading all over the Earthâ€|they succeeded despite losses and with the aid of the Elite Fleet, glassed the city to kill all the Flood in the area.

They gathered their forces and took their best fighters and headed after the Prophet and the Brutes to end it once and for all. They then find the Ark, a massive complex outside of the Milky Way and would be beyond the firing range of the Halo Rings once fired. They arrived and then gathered their respective forces, the ODSTs and the Spec Ops, along with 343 itself, who would aid them in the battles ahead, to launch a full scale twin strike on a shield complex that protected the Control Room of the Ark, though losses were high, they were able to make it through and move to the Control Room to rescue Johnson before the Prophet could force him to activate the Ark and fire all the Halo Rings, Miranda Keyes took matter into her own hands as she crashed her Pelican into the Control Room to free Johnson, but she was surrounded and was about to kill both him and herself to stop Truth, but she hesitated and was killed by the Prophet with a Spike Rifle. The two of them were assisted by the Flood and it's Combat Forms and barely succeeded in stopping the Ark from firing all the Rings. He then personally executed the Prophet with his Energy Sword and they watched as Johnson took the body of Miranda Keyes with him to the Pelican drop-ship, but that was when the now Flood Infested High Clarity came and took over the Ark and began to infest the structureâ€|forcing them to fight their way through the area. Once they did so, 343 informed them that a new Halo Ring was being made and while incomplete, it was primed and ready to fire. They knew that if activated, the weapon would truly kill the Flood forever and without risk to the UNSC and the Covenant Separatists and with both the Ark, High Clarity, and Halo destroyed, there would be no means of escape for the Gravemind and it's Flood Forms. However, they had to take a great risk and infiltrate the now infested High Clarity to retrieve Cortana who had remained behind a long time agoâ€|for she alone had the one thing needed to activate the new Haloâ€|the Index from the Ring the Spartan had destroyed, as the Index was still compatible with the new Ring.

Both he and the Spartan fought their way into the now corrupted and twisted city and the Spartan, with intense strength of body, mind, and will made it in time to free Cortana and with them once more side by side, he supported them as they made it back to the UNSC Frigate 'Forward Unto Dawn' and headed for the new Ringâ€|but not before activating the detonation of the In Amber Clad's fusion reactors and those of High Clarityâ€|destroying the former Covenant capital and supposedly the Gravemind, making it seem that the plan they had before was not that badly neededâ€|

They however found out that the Gravemind still lived and had managed to gather it's forces and began to infest the new Ring, the three of them fought their way to the Control Room, and they were now ready to activate Halo to wipe out the Flood forever, he and the Spartan watched the entrance while Sergeant Johnson took Cortana to activate Halo, but they were betrayed by 343 as it had gone mad and wanted to

preserve 'his ring'. The Forerunner machine mortally wounded Johnson and he was unable to aid the Spartan as he was sealed away from the Control Room, but he watched as the wounded Sergeant fired his Spartan Laser and aided the Chief in slaying the traitorous machine, he watched the two share last words together and watched as the AI and the Spartan fired the ring and rush out as the doors opened.

He felt sympathy for the Spartan as he knew that he and the Sergeant Major were good friends. They then managed to make it in time to the Frigate and he moved to the ship's controls and with Cortana's help, they were able to escape and enter the Slipspace portal to return to Earthâ€|but as they were nearly out, the frigate was cut in half as the portal collapsed in on itself.

He recalled being in the memorial service in Africa for all those who died in the final battle after he had been found as the frigate landed into the sea and he was rescued. On the fragment of the ship was the oath of the UNSC Armed Forces and the pictures, and names of all who died, including Miranda Keyes and Sergeant Major A. J. Johnson, he was there to hear the speech of Lord Hood and the orders to leave this place barren as a reminder for all those who died. It was there that Lord Hood told him how he remembered how the war started, and what his people did to Humanity, for that, the Admiral could never forgive him, but he was grateful that he was there with the Spartan in his final days, and they shook hands that day, though when he heard the Admiral say that it was hard to admit that he was dead he still had doubts about that.

And he doubted the death of the Spartan even more up to now.

"I do not believe that one such as him would die so easily Ship Masterâ€| In the times I had seen him fight and survive, to the times I have seen records of his past battles, and fighting alongside him, I know that what they say about his sense ofâ€|luck, luck that defies any odds is very trueâ€|he has survived far worse and he will not die so easily. No, despite how long it has been, I do not believe that he truly is dead."

The Arbiter looked out towards space and nodded.

"I believe that he is still out there somewhereâ€|and he will be heard of someday soon."

Rtas shook his head at that.

"But we have found no trace of himâ€|even our most seasoned scouting fleets have not found the section of the UNSC Frigate that had broken off when the Slipspace portal collapsed, and even the Humans' own fleets as few as they areâ€|have not found the section themselves. Pardon my words Arbiter, but he must be dead."

"Noâ€|I do not know why I still will not believe that he is truly dead old friend, but I do. If there are truly Gods in this Universe Ship Masterâ€|I highly doubt that they will let one so skilled as him die so easilyâ€|they would have other plans for him. To meâ€|the war between the Covenant, the UNSC, and the Flood may already be over for us, the Humans, and himâ€|but for him, there will be even more battles yet to comeâ€|if not hereâ€|then somewhere elseâ€|far beyond our universe."



The Arbiter then laughed a bit.

"I only hope that those who he will face are prepared to face him. It would have been an honor to see him fight once more."

Rtas laughed a bit at that as well as both Elites looked on to the stars.

In the vast realm of spaceâ€|

Cortana looked in the data records as she looked over the cryo-tube where the Master Chief was currently resting in. And she had already released the distress beacon. But she had no idea when or if they would be foundâ€|after all, they were in unknown space and were in half of the Forward Unto Dawn UNSC Frigate, thankfully, the fusion reactors were still providing residual power, enough to keep everything running, including life support for the cryo-tube.

She then looked at Chief as the Spartan lay there in the tube in cryo-sleep. His vitals signs were all good and he was dreaming somewhat. She was tempted to find out what he was thinking about but did not disturb himâ€|after all that had happened between them and how many things have changed as well. Despite thisâ€|she was glad that they were still side by sideâ€|even if the Spartan was sleeping.

She remembered the time that she had met him, nearly two years ago before the battle on Reach, when she had been asked by her 'mother' Dr. Catherine Halsey to pick the Spartan that she wanted to be paired with. Like all UNSC smart AI, she was modeled after the thought patterns of a person and she was modeled from Dr. Catherine herself.

When she had seen a picture of the Master Chief, she commented as a joke that he was attractive in a primitive animal sort of way. She had done her research on him and noted his records and skills, along with the many awards he had earned over the years, he was a natural leaderâ€|but she saw something none of the others, with the exception of Dr. Halsey, did with John-117â€|luck.

She remembered their battles over the first Halo Ring after escaping the Pillar of Autumn, and how she had witnessed the Master Chief in action and how skilled and lucky he wasâ€|surviving odds that had even her scared. Plus he saw the humanity in him as well as he did his best to save as many of his fellow soldiers' lives as he could manage and the guilt he felt when they died in combat. She recalled her anger at him at times, namely when he had nearly helped 343 activate Halo, and how they had worked together to find Captain Keyes and to destroy Halo, and how they worked together in both the battle on Cairo Station, then on New Mombasa and then to the Delta Haloâ€|until their alliance to the Flood Gravemind.

She recalled how they had been unable to stop the Prophet and the spreading of the Flood in High Clarity when the parasites had infested the In Amber Clad and crashed on High Clarity. She stayed behind to detonate In Amber Clad's reactors and the promise made to her by the Master Chief that he was coming back to get her, but she was unable to do so as the Flood and the Gravemind stopped her cold.

She then recalled the pain and guilt she had for telling the Gravemind what she knew and then was stunned that he came for her regardless of what would happen to him and how he stated that she should know him well, when he made a promise, he would keep it no matter what.

I was right in choosing himâ€|

The AI looked at her protector as he slept and then pondered another question that was on her mind for so long now ever since they drifted into space. With the Covenant Loyalists defeated, the Flood obliterated, and the Halo Rings now permanently disabledâ€|the War was now overâ€|both for the Covenant Separatists, The UNSC, and naturally for her and the Chief.

Noâ€|I think I should call him by his nameâ€|John. John-117, I always wanted to call him by that name.

The question in her mind wasâ€|what would they do now?

Even if they were found, which was very much uncertain due to where they were drifting, there was no war left for her and John-117 to fight in. She knew that the Spartans were trained for war all their lives, John as wellâ€|so in an age of peaceâ€|where would he go? All he had known was a life of combat? What would be his path now that the war was over?

She pondered it over and over, even if there would be eventual rebellions, Humanity would not be willing to start another war anytime soon, and it would be a long time before they would no doubt be foundâ€|a lot can happen in that much time.

There was also the fact that as a smart AI, she had a limited life span due to thinking to the point of crashing her systems and would cease functioning, she didn't know why, but the thought of leaving John alone was a very painful feeling that made her wish that she would notâ€|die now. She may joke about her having a relationship with the Spartanâ€|but in truthâ€|she cared more than she cared to admit for him. She had felt and seen his guilt and human nature despite his military life and harsh years growing up. She suspected that her feelings were due to the fact that Dr. Catherine Halsey had deep affections for John-117 which while it was true that she had feelings of affection to all the other Spartans, her feelings for the Spartan leader were at a slightly higher degree, and since she had her thought patterns based from the Doctor, she might have those feelingsâ€|but hers were now deeper than beforeâ€|she didn't want to leave now, but there were so many things that made her death a certaintyâ€|but despite her fearsâ€|she was happy that at leastâ€|he would be there with her when the time did come.

He said to meâ€|Wake me, when you need meâ€|For all you have done Johnâ€|thank youâ€|sleep now, it's my turn to watch over you now.

With that thoughtâ€|Cortana kept her scans of the areas of space.

Unknown to Cortana, things had changed greatly, as while they were in spaceâ€|they were no longer in the SAME universe they had come from.

The Forerunners were highly advanced and their use of Slipspace technology was vast and great, even more so than the Covenant, before and after they were wiped out when they fired the rings nearly 100,000 years ago. Their empire was vast and powerful before their deaths and though the Covenant was highly advanced, they used only salvaged Forerunner technology and had not yet fully grasped the secrets the Forerunners took to their graves when the Halo Rings were fired.

They knew a lot more about Slipspace than either the UNSC or the Covenant did, and it's myriads of hidden secrets. And she and the Master Chief had just been subjected to that, as when Halo had been firedâ€|the energy that was unleashed had not only made the portal collapse, but had slingshot the section of the Frigate they were on through all the dimensional barriers in their universe and Slipspace itselfâ€|and had sent them into another universeâ€|so similar to their own but of a completely different history.

And while they drifted, they were now going to enter into another arc of human history in this alternate universe.

In the past in this universe, the people of Earth had finally reached the limit of their planet's sustainable population and resource limits, and the rising amounts of pollution began to make the planet uninhabitableâ€|and the space cities established, along with the occasional asteroid mining complex could no longer provide the needed materials and resources to feed the ever hungry populace of the planet.

Like the UNSC, they too realized that they would soon have to develop technology and expand far beyond their solar systemâ€|however, despite their own advanced technology, they did not develop Slipspace drive technology and instead developed a new and very experimental power source known as the Paeksis. This was possible due to the discovery of a large deposit of energy releasing crystals that was found on a routine asteroid mining operation in deep space

The power source could unleash massive amounts of power that had to be regulated in order to prevent a disaster. Over the years that passed, the Paeksis was refined well enough as both and resources would allowâ€|and in the spanning of a few years, the first wave of Colonial ships took off from Earth in what was known to the humans in this Earth as the Colonization Era.

In the years that followed the Colonization Era, and the years spent by the crew in cryo-stasis and many of the ships landed on several habitable planets, and in time it seemed that the Human Race in this universe would flourish and grow.

But like the UNSC's expansion days and the formation of the Inner Colonies and the Outer Colonies, the colonists, one group in particular had now found a new enemyâ€|

Each other.

The Colony Ship known as the Ikazuchi had traveled to a system through a massive debris belt filled with dust, asteroids, and energy storms, and for some reason, the crew of the Ikazuchi got into a deep argument and in that moment, both factions, male and female separated

the Ikazuchi and yet on with their own plans to colonize the worlds in the system.

The men landed on the desert world and the women landed on a lush world and with the technology that they had gained from both sections of the Ikazuchi, they created two totally separate societies.

The men founded the Tarak Empire and this empire was ruled entirely by the eight men who were part of the original crew and were populated by men who were born through the use of artificial birthing machines and cloning, despite this rather unorthodox method of conception, the men grew into a society that valued strength, practicality, honesty, honor, bravery, and keeping a promise.

The men grew up in a world where practical knowledge, survival training, physical strength, practicality, endurance, proper use of resources, and utility were prized above aesthetics, beauty and wasteful uses of all resourcesâ€|valued traits for them in such a deadly and unforgiving world where death came in many forms and the land itself could kill the unwary and ill-prepared.

However, like all things, places, and peopleâ€|they too had flaws. The men of Tarak viewed women as nothing more than monsters who ate their livers, and even looking and speaking to one would result in the man who does so to lose his eyes and hearing as women were supposed to be ugly beyond measure and their voices could cause men to rot. They also dedicated their resources and technology to warfare and never for the betterment of their fellow men, every new discovery was tested for the potential for warfare.

Their society, while strict and effective treated those of the lower classes as worse than dirt. The First Class Citizens of the Tarak Empire were considered to be the elite and got the best of everything, food, water, education, resources, medical care, and more. They were the members of Government, held military positions, and were the leaders of every military, social, and industrial positions on Tarak. The Second Class were the middlemen, higher than the Third Class, but were lower than the First Class Citizens, they served as merchants, lower government officials, lower ranking officers, scientists and designers. The Third Class were the menial laborers, forced to work the most menial tasks and were provided the worst medical care, treatment, education, food, and more. They also do not celebrate other holidays except the birthdays of their leaders.

Nevertheless, that is the life led by the Tarak men and all that they want is to prove their manliness to their foes, the women.

The women who landed on the lush world founded their own society known as the Megele Kingdom. And this kingdom was under the rule of the eight women who were part of the original crew of the Ikazuchi, they populated their world through cloning as well, but in a more unique manner as they all were capable of reproducing internally, unlike the men who used artificial means to have children, they were able to populate the world in the same year as the men did on Tarak. The world the women lived in had a society that prided beauty, technological advantage, competition to be the best, and advancing further in various fields.

That plus the fact that their world is lush and fertile gives them

the supplies and materials to do just that. They also celebrate important human traditions such as Christmas, and due to these qualities, they tend to be more open emotionally than the men of Tarak.

However, though they did not have a strict caste system like the men of Tarak did, they had their own flaws. They fight each other in order to be the best at any field, to the point they would use underhanded tactics to do so and consume vast resources from both Megele and their colonies on many trivial matters, to the point of near saturation. This, plus their harsh attitudes to those who fall due to their conspiracies, plots, and schemes had led to more than one city being stripped of power, food, water, and the basic amenities. This has been the cause that some women chose to become pirates, preying on both ships from Megele and Tarak.

As of now, the men of Tarak were in the process of launching one of their new battle-groups including a newly reconstructed Ikazuchi, the colony ship was retrofitted with new sections, living quarters, training halls, armories, manufacturing stations, and launching bays for their latest achievements powered armor suits known as Vanguards these mecha were to be their finest weapon against the women. And the battle-fleet had one purpose.

To stop the pirates who have raided their ships for a long period of time and many of their Third Generation sons were now ready to go into combat. And they were all eager to finally get the chance to show women their place, and to show their manliness to the universe.

In the asteroid belt that was forming the barrier to the outside world on Tarak and Megele, the said band of female pirates were getting ready to land the biggest catch of their careers, though they had made some last minute roster changes, leaving behind most of their veterans and taking a large number of new recruits to give them some experience in combat and to make this a quick run. This was going to be a cakewalk, despite the rumors of a new weapon being made by the men.

They all had no idea that while their civilizations flourished along with other colony planets, the situation on Earth had deteriorated for that past century and the planet had been completely rendered barren. Their former kin who managed to survive in the now ruined home world of humanity began to lose their sense of morals and sanity and now considered themselves the true inheritors of humanity and they wanted to survive no matter what and they now had initiated a plan that would ensure their survival no matter the cost.

However as the Ikazuchi took off into space and was soon to be followed by its escort fleet and the pirates began to make their move, and the plan of the former Earthlings now in motion

They all had no idea that there was going to be two new players in the galactic scene as the section of the UNSC Frigate 'Forward Unto Dawn' which housed Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan John-117 and UNSC AI No. 0452-9 "Cortana", came into sight of the now orbiting fleet of the men.

It seemed that the Arbiter's words about Master Chief Petty Officer

Spartan II John-117 were going to come true after all.

To be continuedâ€¦

#### Author's Notes:

This is my latest project to date this year and as you can see, this is a crossover of Halo 3 and VanDread. And as far as I can figure, this will be the first of it's kind in this website. I have managed to see the ending of Halo 3, along with Legendary endingâ€¦and it has inspired me to make this crossover between Halo and VanDread as there was tons of potential there.

I will not replace Hibiki with the Master Chief, the youngster will be there and he will be the Vanguard pilot, but as to how he will act around the Spartan once they meet, that is still very much a surprise, but you can bet that they won't be enemies.

It's also up to me on who the Master Chief will be paired with, so be nice and try not to badger me too much on those details, you can send suggestions, but be civil about you're opinions on the topic.

The reason I added the history of both the UNSC and the Covenant and the Flood, was to make it a more unique experience and to make sure that when I get to work in the rest of the story. I have also added the overall events of the Halo series to make it a bit more unique as well.

If anyone asks if I might have the Chief piloting a Vanguard in this story, then the answer is noâ€¦I had planned on doing the same thing as to what had happened to the Vanguard Hibiki wanted to steal in the original seriesâ€¦and changing the Vanguard the Chief will pilot in the story to have the very same functions and appearance of the Mjolnir Mark VI, including the shields and moreâ€¦but a friend of mine, a childhood friend told me that doing so would be going against the very essence of the Halo series, and it would be too much.

Therefore, in keeping true with the spirit and essence of the Halo series, the Master Chief will fill a very important roleâ€¦and that will be as ground operations specialist for the pirates. This will also mean that the Harvesters in the VanDread Universe will have more than just the Cube Fighters, Seed Ships, Space Urchins, and their Battle-ships now that this show is crossed over with Haloâ€¦but as to what new additions they will haveâ€¦ah, that would be telling. Suffice to say, I will make sure to have the Chief have some serious battles with Harvesters and their forces as soon as he meets them...in space, in ships, and on the ground.

The weapons and vehicles in the Halo series, both on the side of the UNSC and some of the Covenant will make their own appearance there as well as Cortana will have their design specs in her data stores and will be able to manufacture them as I will make some very significant changes to the Nirvana to make all that possible and you can bet that things in the VanDread Universe are about to get a serious overhaul!

Not to mention the reactions of the Nirvana crew to this new addition to their rosterâ€¦how will they actâ€¦namely the women pirates when they see his combat records and his data files?

Things are about to get very dicey in that side of the Universe, that's for sure!

See you in Chapter 1 " The Awakening!

Comments and Reviews are very much welcome.

## 2. Chapter 2

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: Under no circumstances do I own Halo and the games connected to the series, nor do I own the anime series VanDread in any way, shape, or form.

### Chapter 1

#### Awakening

:Thoughts

In the Tarak fleet that was recently deployed, things were getting back to normal after an incident concerning a stowaway from the planet, who apparently had attempted to remove on their newly constructed Vanguard. And the rumor mills were already going all out on what was the fate of the stowaway.

"Did you hear? A Third Class citizen had actually managed to sneak into the ship!"

"You're kidding" | "

"I'm not, I was there in the Grand Hall when they raised the Vanguard and there he was!"

"That Third Class trash ruined the whole ceremony and the Prime Minister was furious! That rat is already in the brig."

"What do you think they're going to do to him?"

"What do I think" | they'd either shoot him in the head, or out an airlock" | either way, he's not going to last long."

The speakers were all graduates of Tarak and their military academy and they were all eager to finally be part of the effort to defeat the women pirates who had been attacking their empire's shipping lanes for the past years and the young men were more than eager to place themselves in the front lines to stop the vile female pirates and their attacks on the ships and the deaths of their comrades. They have all seen the images of the pain and suffering the women had inflicted on their forefathers for many generations and now they were ready to move out and attack them for their actions on the proud empire of their forefathers and Grand Pa" | but the mood was spoiled due to an interloper and a stowaway.

One of the cadets however was not concerning himself with the rumors and busied himself with getting ready for duty on the ship.

Duero McFile, 1st Class Citizen and one of the few top graduates of the Academy was now ready to check into the roster and start his rounds. He was already slated to be part of the first watch and he was not going to waste his time with gossip.

Though he did wonder on the fate of the stowaway a bit, there was something that was different about that one, though he was dressed in the very same fashion as that of the rest of the many Third Class Citizens the young man had seen on his days when he and the rest of his fellow cadets, prior to graduation had seen, working in the factories and assembly yardsâ€|many of them were content with their lots in the societyâ€|

But that one who had interrupted the ceremonyâ€|seemedâ€|different.

In the said brigâ€|

How the heck did it come to this?! Maybe I shouldn't have just stayed there all day, but my partner has grown so muchâ€|

The interloper, one Hibiki Tokai by name sat down on the floor of the room as he was still trying to recover some feeling in his limbs after being suddenly shocked by the floating, egg shaped machine that was his guard in the cell he was in. As soon as the young Third Class Citizen was up to his feet, he then began to try and find a way out. Though as to how he was going to accomplish an escape in this kind of situation, he did not know as of yet what he should do.

He recalled the events that got him here and what he wanted out of his life.

Ever since he left his Grandfather's house on the outskirts of Tarak's capital city, he had this desire and this feeling to see just what else was beyond his home planetâ€|that there was far more to being alive as a man than just being forced to build machines and have nothing else to look forward to but another meal and a glass of water, with no other way to go. He wanted to find out if there was more to see and more to learn, and it had always got him into trouble with the other Third Class Citizens. They told him to stop dreaming and focus on doing what they were doing now, to quit thinking of making something more of himself and accept his lot in life.

He however, never wanted to let those things be the only deciding factor in his life and continued to want more, and he boasted that he could prove himself correct, and that very same boast was the reason he was in this mess in the first place. It started out on the day the rest of the men on duty forced him to live up to his boast that he could steal a completely made Vanguard, which had the special mark that they carved into one of the special parts for the vanguard, and naturally, since he was the one who had made the boast, he was picked to steal the Vanguard, and he had wanted to retake his words as he knew the penalty of being caught in a military shipâ€|execution.

But he made a promise and he was a man of Tarak, no matter what class he was, he was not going to go back on his word, so he managed to use the various pathways and access shafts to enter the docks unnoticed. He first used a special eye scanner that he had developed to access the restricted cargo space section of the Ikazuchi and used the supply conveyer belt to get into the ship without being caught by the



dock master. Once he was in, he was able to evade the crew including the engineers, technicians, and mechanics and finally locate the room where the Vanguard's were being stored and though he was nearly busted by the security system there.

It was then that he saw the Vanguard's and spotted the one he was about to steal, he had feared that the unit would have been rejected due to the mark, but he was overjoyed to the sight of his partner fully assembled and looking so pristine. He was about to take the Vanguard to prove his words and actions were true but then the ship launched under the order of the Prime Minister two hours a\early and before he could try and figure out what to do and deal with the shock of what had just happenedâ€|the room rose up and he was now spotted by the other men, namely the cadets and the security personnel, he was captured and was now here, and he had tried to bargain with the robot guarding him and got electrocuted for his trouble.

He looked down at the floor and wondered just what else was going to happen today.

Funny he should askâ€|for at the very momentâ€|

(On the subject of Master Chief John-117's ageâ€| by 'real time' chronology, he is indeed 41 years of age, but we should not forget that when the UNSC used Slipspace drives to travel from one star system to another star system and from planet to planet, the ships they have used are equipped with cryo-stasis tubes that are designed for the crew to use until they get to the destination. And the reason is that Slipspace jumps are not instantaneous and could take a lot of time, a normally short Slipspace jump can take at least 2 months, and a long Slipspace jump could take at least 6 or more months, thus the need to have cryo-tubes. And since people in cryo-sleep don't age at all, it's not surprising that in the novels and some media, Dr. Catherine E. Halsey, head of the Spartan II Program does not appear as old as her age suggests, further adding merit to the fact that no one ages in cryo-sleep. The same could be said for all UNSC personnel and so would the Spartansâ€|)

(This would mean that in the 27 years he has been fighting the Covenant with the UNSC and his fellow Spartans in the Inner Colonies and Outer Colonies, a good portion of the time he spent getting from one battle-ground to the next has been spent in cryo-sleep, thus his biological age is much younger than his 'real time' age as he has not aged at all while in cryo-sleep. And also, the medical care system of the Human race has improved greatly in the past centuries in the Halo universe, thus human life spans are much higher than those of today, and the aging rate has been reduced significantly in the 26th century, and it has been known that John and the Spartans had been also biologically enhanced as well as being enhanced in cybernetics, this would further make them far stronger and tougher than normal humans, and this would make them far healthier than normal humans, and could make them age even less than others.)

(So in truthâ€|the Master Chief would probably be around his mid or late 20s by now.)

In the bridgeâ€|

"Prime Minister!"

"What is it?"

The bald leader of the Tarak strike fleet asked in a still very irritated manner as he looked at the bridge crew member who got his attention. He had been forced to cancel the exhibition match with the Vanguards due to the discovery of the stowaway Third Class Citizen, and he was not in a very good mood as to this interruption.

I am going to have that brat flogged when I get back to Tarak, after he can't take anymore, I'll have him shot!

"The scanners are picking up an unknown object at least 2 to three kilometers from our current location, it appears to be about the size of a ship."

"Is it one of our escort fleets? If it is, then tell them to hold their position and wait for the others." He then went back to dealing with the situation that was going on in his mind and what other punishment they could place on the stowaway.

"It's not one of our ships Prime Ministerâ€¦it appears to be quite differentâ€¦"

The Prime Minister got his attention at that and looked at the officer, along with his second in command. There was something odd going on here and this merited their investigation immediately.

"Is it the pirates we were sent out to exterminate?"

The second in command asked, a portly, bald fellow who had a moustache as well as the Prime Minister. He was concerned as to the fact that while they were fully equipped for warfare with the women, many of the men were still raw and inexperienced pilots of the Vanguards, namely in deep space as unlike the training on the surface of their world, there was no gravity to keep the Vanguards upright.

"I'm not sure Commanderâ€¦it seems to be of an unknown design that does not match ours or that of the women, and it seems to have some sort ofâ€¦unknown transponder code."

The Prime Minister and the Commander both looked at each other with surpriseâ€¦an unknown ship in their region of space, and of a design that does not match either their ship designs or even that of the women of Megeleâ€¦this was certainly worthy of interest, even if they still had a mission to accomplish, some this significant had to seen.

"How soon can we have the ship in visual range?"

"In a few minutes sirâ€¦and our other ships have also send confirmation, they have the unknown ship in sight and we will be receiving their own visual scans at the same time."

The bridge crew and the leaders of the Ikazuchi looked to see what appeared to be a portion of a ship of totally unknown design, and it was in dark gunmetal gray and built in a very much unknown fashion, it appeared to have been in a major battle as the ship seemed to be badly damaged, and as the Tarak fleet got closer, they saw that the ship or what was left of the ship appeared to be relatively intact

despite the damage. There was no doubt about the fact that the ship belonged to neither them nor the womenâ€|so just who did the ship belong to?

"Could it be a ship build by another raceâ€|aliens maybe?" One of the younger bridge crew members asked loudly.

Another officer in the bridge looked at him and with a glare and replied.

"Don't fool yourself, there's no such thing in this universe as aliens! The very idea of that isâ€|"

The Prime Minister looked at both men with a glare, silencing both of them and he then began to think on what will be the next move of the Fleet in light of this discovery, He weighed the options before him and was not very happy with the idea of not being able to deal with the vile women pirates at this time.

"Prime Minister, the Katana is sending in some visual data nowâ€|there appears to be marking and writing on the ship, this might tell us just who the ship belongs to, they are still magnifying it though."

"Put it on the screensâ€|time to find out just who owns that shipâ€|and whether they are allies that we can have on our side against the women or are our enemies as well as them."

The crew watched as the images from their escort ship the Katana came on screen as they began to have a much closer look on the unknown vessel. The ship was designed as some sort of combat ship as the look of the battle scarred hull told them that there was no way it was a civilian ship or convoy ship at all, therefore it was built for combatâ€|despite it's size, which was somewhat lesser than their escort ships. It was then that they all saw the writing on the hull of the ship.

"United Nations Space Command Frigateâ€|Forward Unto Dawnâ€|it certainly is not one of ours Prime Minister, there is no mention of any such organization within our databases both back on Tarak and here in the archives from the Ikazuchi."

"No records at all?"

"None, Prime Minister, this must mean that the ship is truly of unknown origin."

The Prime Minister then weighed over the new information, in front of him was an unknown warship from a faction that no one on Tarak knew of, and it was not of the design of the women. And apparently it was not inhabited at all, and there was the possibility that the crew of the ship were all killed in whatever fighting the ship had been in. It was then that he decided to see if there could be anything on that ship that the Tarak Empire could use against the women.

Despite the condition of the ship, there was a big possibility that there could be weapons and technology left in the ship that they could find of use. Even if the ship seemed to be a wreck, the Prime Minister knew that there would still things of value in the wreckâ€|and he and the men under his command learned to always be

able to make due with what they had could find and had on hand, that was how their empire was formed by the eight founding fore-fathers, and Grand Pa.

"Is there any form of activity on the ship?"

"The scanners have detected faint power readings that indicate that while most of the power supply is drained, the reactors are still emitting residual energy, and from the amounts of energy that we are detecting, the ship must have fusion reactors. Scans have also located what appear to be weapon systems that are on the ship, though we are not entirely sure as to what sort of weapons the ship has on it's body."

The Prime Minister then thought it over, and decided that exploring the ship and finding out anything from it would be worth the time and effort.

"Have the Fleet move closer to the Frigate and have the Vanguard's that can be spared to go there and take the Frigate to the Ikazuchi—once that's done, have an airlock tunnel connect to the Frigate and send a retrieval salvage and recovery team find out what they can on the ship. I want to know just who owns that ship, and what data, equipment, and technology we can salvage from it. The ship may also give us another edge we can use on the women."

"Understood Prime Minister!"

The men in the Ikazuchi were busy getting to their stations until they were able to see the image of the UNSC Frigate before them on the view screens, some of them wondered what that was it was not like the pictures of the female pirate ship that they had been told was their foe. At the moment, an announcement came on the ship's communications network.

"Attention to all crew members of the Ikazuchi—we have found a ship that we may be able to salvage and gather information from, in light of this new discovery, the cancelled exhibition of the Vanguard's will be replaced with a recovery operation, Several Vanguard pilots will be selected to go out of the Ikazuchi to escort the Fleet and to secure the ship for the entrance of our engineers to begin a retrieval, salvage, and recovery operation."

The men looked at each other and went on to do their duties and accomplish their new mission objectives, though it was natural that there would be a few of them who were not happy that instead of using their new and powerful Vanguard weapons on the women who deserve to be shown their place, the machines were now to be used as salvagers.

Unknown to the men—

"It seems that the men have found something in the area that they are interested in Captain, Commander. The male fleet is moving to a new vector away from their prescribed path."

The leader of the pirates then looked at the images of the Tarak fleet as the men seemed concerned with what appeared to be wreck of ship, that amazingly enough, upon closer scanning did not match any ship she knew of, both from her world and the world of the men, this

seemed to make things very interesting, as whatever the men had found, it seemed to merit their full attention.

"Captain, should we continue the raid?"

"Yesâ€¦but this time, let's see if we can figure out just what the men are interested inâ€¦if possible, wait until the men have secured that thing they are after."

"Yes Captain!"

It seemed that the female pirates were getting ready to not only score the biggest catch of their careers, but they were also going to get themselves a bonus prize. This was really going to be their lucky day.

Unknown to either the men of Tarak or the women of Megeleâ€¦the supposed section of the ship that they were now interested inâ€¦had some already present company, and one of them had just finished her analysis of their forcesâ€¦and was getting ready to respond to their intentionsâ€¦

In the section of the Forward Unto Dawnâ€¦

Cortana looked on as she kept her passive scanners on the unknown fleet heading towards them. The UNSC smart AI had been able to locate the Tarak Fleet just only a few minutes after they were in position for their supposed patrol of the area. At first she had hoped that they were a UNSC recon fleet, or even a Covenant Separatist fleet, but as soon as she was able to scan and see the ships coming towards the section she and the Master Chief were in, her hopes were replaced with suspicions. Not a single one of those ships were recognizableâ€¦they didn't match the ships that were in the UNSC Navy, and they certainly didn't match up to the Covenant ships she had seen in her long years of service with the UNSC fleet.

The AI then determined that the unknown fleet were numerous and were already beginning to close the distance to the Forward Unto Dawn. She had few options right now as she realized that not only were they not UNSC made ships or Covenant made ships, but they had all had a transponder and IFF tag that certainly didn't match anything in her databaseâ€¦she had at first suspected them to anti-UNSC rebels, just like the United Rebel Front, the Eridanus Rebels, or worseâ€¦but the AI discounted those ideas for several reasons. The first was the fact that even the Eridanus Rebels and all known anti-UNSC forces used salvaged or black market acquired UNSC equipment, they didn't have the resources and manpower to both equip and staff ships of that size. The second was that both factions were wiped out when the Covenant invaded the UNSC Outer and Inner Colonies during the early to mid years of the war, and the last was that the ships were not armed with MAC guns.

Every UNSC ship was equipped with a MAC gun and several point defense guns and Archer missile pods, all along with Long-sword fighter squadrons were basic add-ons to the UNSC fleet. This meant that these were unknown forcesâ€¦and considering the fact that she managed to barely scan weapon systems and sensors on the ships, they were a combat Fleet and were naturally potential hostiles.

They were not also Covenant shipsâ€¦not only did they not match the

overall physical appearance and design forms of every Covenant ship she knew of in her data archivesâ€|they also did not have the residual energy field that showed her that the ships were armed with anything resembling in the most basic Covenant ship shielding. Their weapons arrays were also not as advanced and this was beginning to make her nervous.

With the Forward Unto Dawn bare of any form of power, no forms of defense, no way to contact the unknown forces, and her scanners not to their full potential, she was running the risk of being unable to stop the unknown forces from boarding the ship and finding both her and John, there were other very deadly risks as well. There was a chance that the forces coming in would try and hack into her systems and gather information on the UNSC, and might even learn the location of Earth, even if the war was over, she was still programmed with the data of Earth's location and she was not going to let them find it, the second risk was that they might attack John while he was in cryo-stasis and if anything happened while the Spartan was still in cryo-stasis, it could permanently kill him as the risks of freezer burn were high, and not even a Spartan like John could withstand that.

This meant she had only one option, they were going to have to get ready for combat. She quickly made the needed commands to begin awakening her protector from his cryo-stasis. She didn't want to suddenly awaken John and therefore underwent to procedure slowly and carefully. She checked as the freeze gases in the cryo-tube began to filter out as the cryo-tube opened and the AI saw the Mjolnir Mark VI suit that her friend and comrade wore. She checked his vital signs and smiled as she determined that he was not in danger of freezer burn. She smiled once more as her scans in the cryo-tube showed that he was awakeâ€|sure enough, the Spartan turned to her and she looked back at his visor.

"Nice to see you again John."

"Cortanaâ€|are youâ€|"

"No, not yet, I'm not crashing down just yet John."

"Then what is it? Is there a rescue fleet coming?"

"There's a fleet heading to our direction all right, but we've got a problemâ€|they're not UNSC shipsâ€|or even Covenant ships, they're of a type I've never seen before."

Inside his helmet, the Spartan frowned at the news and managed to lift his body out of the cryo-tube and then sent a mental command to his Mjolnir Mark VI to administer some wake up-stim injections into his blood stream to get his body back into moving shape, he then ran a check on his suit's status. As he ran through his systems, namely his hydrostatic gel later, his pressure seals, the medical systems, the reactive metal liquid crystal, his fusion power pack, his COM systems, the FoF scanner, his Heads Up Display, the memory processor super conducting metal weave, and his weapon ammunition scanner. He then began to run the suit's diagnostics on his shields, he smiled a bit as his scans turned up to indicate that the systems were all good and shields were now charging, he heard the slight hum as the shields began to power up while he looked at his shield gauge.

As soon as he finished with his shields, he quickly turned and floated towards his MA5C ICWS Assault rifle and removed it from its holding unit, the weapon's electronics suite came online and told him he had a full combat load and at least 11 magazines left in his Mark VI's ammunition compartment and he then placed the weapon on his back and there was a slight thump on his back as the magnetic pads held the weapon in place, he then reached for a nearby M7 Caseless Submachine Gun and the four magazines nearby and loaded the extra ammunition in the spare compartment on his armor and managed to grab yet another M7 and also loaded the spare magazines into the compartment along with the ones he had placed in already. He then grabbed a pair of grenades and a Combat Knife that he placed in the belt for easy reach—once he was now was fully prepped, he then turned and moved towards Cortana.

"How many are there?"

"My scanning abilities are pretty limited, even though I've determined that they are not either UNSC or Covenant, and they are large, I just can't be sure of just how many there are, so far, with whatever spare power I can get from the Dawn's fusion reactors, I can tell that there are at least three ships—large ones heading in our direction—I can't be entirely sure with the data I'm getting from whatever scanning ability I have left, but one of them appears to be the main flagship of the Fleet, and it's the one that's trying to dock with us—my guess is that the ones who are leading this unknown fleet want to see the Dawn at a more personal level—my guess is, they might send in a salvage team."

John-117 nodded as he weighed his options, if he did nothing, whoever these guys were, they would no doubt try something that could endanger both him and Cortana. He was not about to risk their lives just yet, but he needed to find out just who these people were and if they were indeed hostile. These were unknown contacts and while he had a mission to do, which was to protect Cortana at all costs, he was not going to start an incident that could be disastrous. Right now, he could sense that he had several options. The first was to try and find out just who they were dealing with without getting killed which would require some sneaking around, the second was the go in and fight his way through. Both had good and bad points, but he then decided to try and get an idea of just what they might be up against. With that in mind, he quickly placed his hand into the holo-tank and Cortana was now downloaded directly into the Mjolnir's main memory weave core. With that done, he began to make his way towards the severed section of the Frigate.

"What do you have in mind?"

"I'm going to find out just what sort of ship we're going to be docked with."

"Are you sure about that idea? For all we know, they might see you and fire on us."

"Got any better ideas?"

"Afraid not—so try to keep out of sight."

"Got it."

The Spartan moved through the corridors while floating in Z-gravity and the Spartan was not very comfortable with the situation. John-117 had taken training in z-gravity combat and his Mjolnir Mark VI had special magnetic pads on the boots to allow him to move and fight on a ship's outer hull, but he was not very comfortable in that regard of a battle environment. As he made his way to the severed area, he was able to use the dark shadows to his advantage in order to stay hidden. As he was reaching the area of the opening, his motion sensors suddenly gave off a warning as he saw a massive object moving nearby.

Cortana saw it as well and spoke quickly.

"There's something massive coming in fast John! Better hide!"

The Spartan wasted little time and placed himself on the walls and in the shadows near a door and managed to peek out a bitâ€¦

To see a massive humanoid like head made of gun-metal grey metal with one massive eyeâ€¦the strange machine moved on and a few seconds passed as the Spartan stayed hidden as best he could and kept an eye on the motion sensor radar until the massive object was out of the radar's scanning range.

"What was that?" The Spartan asked as he looked a bit more out the wall of the door and looked on, carefully checking his motion scanners again, just in case there were more of the massive machines coming by.

Cortana replied to that question with some surprise of her own.

"I'm not sureâ€¦I've never seen anything like it, but it seemed to be some sort of massive robot, no doubt designed for operations in space, from the looks of it, though land operations must be possible. Hold on a secondâ€¦I think we're about to see the ship."

The Spartan and the UNSC AI looked to see the massive form of the Ikazuchi as the massive Tarak battle-ship began to close in on the section of the Frigate, the ship was very much bigger than most normal ships and the two looked on, trying to figure out just what sort of new beings they were about to encounter as the ship came into closer viewâ€¦they then noted the strange insignia of the Tarak Empire and the name of the ship.

"That's no symbol I'm familiar withâ€¦though the name sounds oddly familiar."

"Ikazuchiâ€¦that sounds familiar to me too. But it seems we're dealing with a combined flagship here, not one ship."

"Pardon?"

The Spartan then pointed towards the Tarak flagship, namely to the section in the middle of the ship itself.

"That section appears to be a lot older than the other sections, I can see connecting sections from the other areas to the main one, the color may be new but it's different from the rest and yet the hull plating appears to be older than the new sections. It looks like the middle section must be a salvaged ship of some type. Plus the design



of the middle section doesn't match the other sections as well."

The AI then used the optical systems of the Mark VI and noted that her protector was right on what he suspected and she then detected several more of the massive robots coming and then stopped as the ship began to get closer. The Spartan and his AI companion and friend then watched as the ship then seemed to be moving alongside them and they then heard the sounds of something hitting the side hulls of the Forward Unto Dawn. The Spartan then took the risk and ventured outside while activating the magnetic pads on the boots of his Mark VI and then began to walk on the hull and look towards where the impacts came from and spotted long access ways locking onto the hull. There were also other long magnetic arms that were not access designed and were now holding the Frigate stable.

"They must be planning to send their salvage forces through those access-ways. They will have to use something to break through the hull of the Frigate, but considering the condition of the Dawn when the Slipspace portal collapse it might not take them much."

The Spartan then thought of the options that they now had as the fact that the unknown beings that had found them would soon be boarding the frigate as badly damaged as it was. This was making things a lot harder. And then he decided that at the rate things were going, they could not stay on the Frigate anymore. So he decided to take a huge risk, which was not very new to him at this point, he had taken risks before and this time, it was going to be no different. He moved back into the Frigate and made his way through the corridors back to the cryo-tube and then placed his hand over the holo-tank, sending Cortana back to her original place.

The Ai then looked at the Spartan and gave a slight frown.

"You're up to something again I may not see you're face, but I know that posture of yours, what is it?"

"We've only got a few minutes before they send out a salvage team on this Frigate, considering that we don't much of a ship begin"

Cortana's confusion didn't last long as she quickly understood just what the Spartan had in mind, the two of them had done this before on one of the Covenant ships namely the Ascendant Justice after the destruction of the first Halo ring. However, while that was most famed UNSC raid in UNSC history accomplished by only a small handful UNSC personnel and several Spartans there were some problems to the idea.

"You've got to be kidding it worked the first time John but we're talking about taking a ship, which judging by it's size would have a massive crew complement, and just in case you might forget there's only two of us right now."

"I know."

Cortana smiled a bit at the determination in her partner's voice. She knew him well enough to know that he had been in far worse spots than this and he could handle any odds, that might not ease her uncertainty about what they were about to get into, but she felt fine with him around.

"All rightâ€¦let's get to itâ€¦but before you yank me, promise me one thing."

"Name it."

"Keep you're head downâ€¦like I said, there's two of us in there now."

The Spartan nodded and reached downwards to get Cortana's main data chip and slide it back into the receptacle into his helmetâ€¦when all of the sudden, the entire frigate began to shake and despite the lack of sound, the two could swear they could hear explosions.

Hibiki tried once more to reason with the robotic guard of his cell when the ship suddenly began to shake and buckle and then the entire ship listed backwards, sending him back into the various boxes and containers in his cell, and that also sent the robot which had it's own anti-gravity system crashing into the energy bars, shortening itself out and weakening the laser bars as wellâ€¦and as soon as the young man managed to get wind oh his senses, he wondered just what the heck was going on now.

The pirates had struck as they began to attack the Tarak ships and namely the Ikazuchi once they were sure that the men had firmly secured the unknown ship to the Ikazuchi's older section. With that all working out the way they wanted, they then launched their Dreads. The sleek and agile Megele fighters were able to evade the slow and prodding turrets of the Tarak ships as they worked on the strategy of crippling the ships by taking out their weapons and engines, leaving the ships dead in space while they focused on their main prizeâ€¦the Ikazuchi itself.

Inside the Ikazuchi, the Prime Minister was livid with outrage as he watched his prize fleet being attacked by the Megele pirates, and he was even more angry when they discovered that the women were cowardly using their own escort ships as shields, even if they could retaliate, they would end up firing on their own men. He then gave the order for all Vanguard pilots and their Vanguards to be deployed.

Naturally the Commander was not very pleased with the idea as he faced the Prime Minister.

"Sir! Many of the Vanguard pilots are mere trainees, how can they stop the attacks of the women if they had no combat experience?!"

"If we lose this ship to the women all because we hesitated to use our latest weapons, we will bring even more shame to ourselves and to Grand Pa! We may have not been able to predict the women's cowardly attacks, but we will not let them have either this ship or our new catch without a fight! Launch all Vanguards! That is an order!"

In the Forward Unto Dawnâ€¦|

The Spartan wasted no time as he quickly took out the data chip that was Cortana's main core and slid it into his helmet once more as he moved back out to see just what the heck was going on. As soon as he arrived, he spotted the massive number of debris and saw streaks of

light passing around the other ships and the Ikazuchi. They appeared to be fighters, but not like anything he has ever seen before.

Cortana agreed as she saw the fighters as well.

"Those aren't Long-swords or Seraphs, but they can certainly move fast."

They then saw the Vanguard as the human shaped robots were unleashed from the Ikazuchi and began to engage the Megele fighters, however, even from a long distance, the Master Chief could tell that while the pilots for the fighters were good, the ones piloting the robotic suits were merely trainees as they were not properly armed and they didn't move well.

"This is getting more odd by the minute Johnâ€¦we're going to have to move fast before we get caught in the cross-fireâ€¦are you sure you want to do what you intend to do?"

"Pretty muchâ€¦you ready?"

"Always."

Was Cortana's reply to the Spartan's question, she might not like some of his plans, but they certainly worked when push came to shove.

With that, the Spartan grabbed a nearby floating grenade and then moved back to the hull of the Frigate and looked to spot a nearby airlock. He made sure to check his distance and found it to be manageable. With the plan in his mind, he wedged the spare grenade into a crack on the hull and then quickly primed it, dug his feet on the hull and leaped forward. The following explosion rocked his shields, but it also catapulted him forward as he closed the gap towards the airlock. As soon as he hit the hull of the Ikazuchi, he activated his Mark VI's magnetic pads on the boots and walked his way to the airlock and then placed his hand on the nearby manual pad and watched as Cortana did her magic, it took only a few seconds for the UNSC AI to open the airlock and the Spartan moved into the airlock chamber. Once he was inside, he then placed his hand on the chamber's manual computer to open the inner doors to allow him into the ship.

As soon as he was inside the Ikazuchi, he quickly took out his MA5C and moved out as quietly as he could and listened to the sound of klaxons, and warning sirens. He then spotted a nearby terminal that appeared to be functioning and intact. He knew that he needed some data and schematics of the ship, the last thing he wanted was to get lost in the massive unknown ship made by unknown people who apparently were at war with someone else. As he touched the screen Cortana did her magic and began to hack into the data cores of the Ikazuchi and gathered whatever relevant data she could find. However a large part of the data she found stunned her.

"You've got to be kidding me!"

"What is it?"

"This shipâ€¦it's a colony ship from Earth!"

"Earth?! That can't be right, it doesn't match any recorded colony ship that was used by the UNSC that I know of from my days back on Reach."

"I knowâ€|but what's even more shocking is that, this was not launched by the UNSCâ€|in factâ€|there's no mention of the UNSC or the UEG anywhere in the records. According to the data I've gottenâ€|this ship, or at least the section we're in was part of a colonial fleet sent out to populate the stars after Earth was consumed by pollutionâ€|but along the way something occurred between both the crews and eight menâ€|took this section of the original Ikazuchi and landed on a nearby desert world and founded a civilizationâ€|"

The explosions became louder and the warning that the pirates were getting ready to board the Ikazuchi through hull breaches made the Spartan go back to his plan.

"Let's put that aside for nowâ€|what's the situation so far?"

Cortana then hacked into the communications arrays and relays and then gave her companion the information he requested.

"The battle-net here is in absolute chaosâ€|they were unable to repel the incoming fighters that we saw earlier, their escort ships are crippled and unable to assist, and their weapon systems are offline, and several of the pirate ships are now entering through the breaches and are sending in their teams to secure the vessel. They are already managing to break through several security check-points, but so farâ€|all they are doing is subduing the crew."

"How much further are we from the bridge/?"

"At least several more sectors, the quickest way would have to be through the Paeksis reactor room. I'll upload you the coordinates of the reactor room then the bridge to you're NAV point marker. We'll have to avoid hurting the people here John, they may be unknown contacts, but they are human, fight only if they strike first."

"Got it."

With that part of the job done, the Spartan moved away from the terminal and moved on, running at his top speed and following the NAV point that was to guide him to the location of the Paeksis reactor room.

In another part of the Ikazuchiâ€|

The pirates then managed to breach another section of the Ikazuchi even more as their Dreads began to enter the holes and then the men got ready to fight as they managed to seal off the area to preserve the oxygen to the breached area. One particular Tarak cadet was screaming in panic and hysteria as he still hid in the statue that just got it's head sliced off by a passing Dread fighter, as the rest of the pirates in formless and hideously masked suits made their way in, while using laser based weapons to fight with the Tarak security forces who were armed with assault rifles that fired solid rounds.

The suits were made in that way to ensure that they could play on the fears and propaganda of the men towards women, and was working, but even though the suits were effective and had forms of protection one of the women was injured when a Tarak assault rifle round pierced her suit.

However, the Dread that sliced off the head of the statue that the cadet, one named Bart Garsus by name continued on, apparently the pilot was unable to stop her fighter as it came closer to a wall. The pilot saw what was happening and began to panic

"Oh no! Please Stop!"

It was then that she accidentally activated the weapon systems of her Dread and open fired at the wall.

In the reactor roomâ€¦

"Darn it! I've got to get my partner and get out of here now!"

Hibiki Tokai ran as fast as he could manage as he headed back to where his Vanguard was located and then make his way back to Tarak. He had managed to use the down robot guard to finish unlocking the remaining laser bars on his cell and was happy to finally be able to leave, but decided to bring the very same robot with him since he could reprogram it and use it for his own uses, he was not just a good mechanic, but also had some good skills in electronics.

However, the sight of the ship being badly damaged was baking him worry even more as he tried to find his way back to his partner, and the warnings that told him that the women pirates had attacked, made him even more afraid as he rushed through several gangways near the reactor. However, he suddenly turned and spotted a massive bulge in the wall above him and could only stare.

At the same timeâ€¦

The Spartan was moving as fast as he could and was already in the reactor room, on the ground floor when he suddenly heard the sounds of expanding metal, Cortana reacted just as fast and detected the massive swell of energy coming through the walls.

"John! Incoming!"

The Spartan quickly rolled out of the way as the explosion occurred and he was then forced to hide under a fallen piece of metal as the explosion filled the room.

The Ikazuchi's main Command Bridgeâ€¦

"Minister! Please! You mustn't do this!" The second in command begged as he saw the lever in the Prime Minister's command console.

The supreme commander of the now decimated Talark Space Fleet shook his head as grabbed hold of the large lever designed to separate the old colonial ship section with the new sections. "We can ill-afford to let this entire ship fall into the hands of those pirates! I must

at least save the new sections of the ship! Before all is lost I will separate the old from the new!"

"But what about the men who are still on the old section of the Ikazuchi?! We can't just turn our backs and leave them behind! They are our new generation Prime Minister, we can't just leave them now and at this pointâ€|they are our future!"

"We must not hesitate and do what we canâ€|even if it means that we have to leave those fine young men behindâ€|for nowâ€|we will make the women pay for this crime and if they have killed any of our young men, then we will make sure to remember this day and avenge them. We must do what we can, and we must not hesitate!"

With that and with no hesitation, he pushed the lever forward.

Throughout the whole of the Ikazuchi, several chains of explosions were heard as explosive charges were detonated, causing the new sections to be detached from the original vessel. The cadets who were still in the barracks of the old colonial section watched in horror as they were abandoned by their leaders. The only cadet who showed no surprise or fear of this event was none other than Duero. As he knew that for all their talk of bravery the top brass were nothing but cowards and hypocrites.

In the reactor roomâ€|

Hibiki shook his head a bit and tried to get his bearings back as he reached forward to try and move whatever it was that was on top of him. However, his hands then touched something soft, firm, and squishy. As soon as that registered in his brain he opened his eyes furtherâ€|and found himself looking at a very scary faceâ€|he panicked and pushed the being over him afraid that he had just met a woman.

"M-M-M-Monster!!!"

"Please wait!"

Something in the voice suddenly made him stop and turn around and spotted as the scary figure reached for it's face and then took it offâ€|to reveal yet another faceâ€|and this one was differentâ€|very different.

Dita Liebely took off her mask and shook her long mane of red hair free, along with small jewel that she wore as a pendant, along with the golden tiara on her head. As she finally got off a portion of her space suit she smiled warmly as she looked at Hibiki, her deep blue eyes sparkling in joy as she took a good long look at her very first man.

"Wow! A real live alien!"

"Alien?!"

Hibiki then looked on, still very tense as Dita inched closer towards him and then placed on her hands forward, which were bare of the gloves of her space suit, and began to move hands in certain waving motions, the Tarak youth wondered what was going on and then began to

follow the very same actions that the young woman had done when he did so perfectly, the bubbly redhead cheered.

"I did it! I really did it! I made first contact!"

Hibiki had seen enough and decided to bug out of the area as fast as he could. With one word from his mouth as he grabbed his bag and grabbed the robot and ran.

"Bye!"

Dita however was dismayed as she tried to get out of her space suit and revealed herself to be wearing a short long sleeved jacket, a tank top, a short skirt that resembled a mini-skirt and short boots. She then reached for her suit to get her camera as she called out to Hibiki.

"Wait! Let me take a picture!!!"

Unknown to either of them, the Paeksis began to glow as if it sensed their presence.

In another part of the Ikazuchi

A hiss ran out as the Tarak cadet opened his eyes and gritted his teeth as he raised his hands, showing that he was surrendering. He was then herded along with the other young men as the female pirates, some of them now free from their own space suits and armed with laser rifles, were watching over them and making sure none of them tried to either fight back or escape. Among them was Duero McFile who kept his attention on the situation around him and he then noted the actions of the women.

"Darn it! I know that there's disinfectant in here, but I never get used to the smell."

The speaker took off her own disguise and was now bare of the suit and moved her long wave of blonde hair. Jura Basil Elden looked around and commented at the Vanguard's that were in the area. The blonde 20 year old woman was stunningly attractive, a testament to the inbreeding in Megele as she had a lush, and well formed and endowed figure that would have made many models back on Earth, namely the UNSC controlled Earth green with envy, and every red blooded male howling like wolves after meat.

Not only did she have the curves and swells in the right places, but she had the height to go with it being at the height of 5'9, and the beautiful face as well, along with the deep emerald green eyes that would have been hypnotizing for any man not from Tarak, along with the kissable lips as well.

To add further weight to the package, she was dressed in a dress that had her front exposed up to her belly button which exposed her front well, with only two flaps of the soft and comfortable material covering her more than ample breasts and those were held by a ring on the collar of the outfit, there were also slits on the lower dress, reaching up to her hips, revealing her long legs and her feet were covered in soft boots at ankle length. Her arms were bare but she wore special sleeves that were held to her arms by brown straps of soft and comfortable leather. Despite the rather revealing get-up,

Jura was not vulnerable as she was armed with a slim but strong rapier sword.

"I thought we were going to get some brand new items to add, but the only things we get for our troubles are just these hunks of junk."

"Has anyone seen Dita?"

Another woman asked as she too removed her suit and helmet.

The new woman's name was Meia, Meia Gisborn; she was younger than Jura by at least one year, placing her age at 19. She was tall as well, though not as tall as her blonde companion at the height of 5'6.

Her body was completely athletic showing also well defined curves that would have attracted the eyes of men who also knew how to appreciate the female figure. Her hair was cut to a short boyish style, which still suited her well. On the left side of her face, which had, a light cream complexion as well was a strange metal circlet that still didn't mar her appearance nor break away the glitter of her blue-green eyes. She also wore a form-fitting suit that was gray, black, and white that also showed her curves even more, along with her breasts.

Meia however, showed a great deal of leadership skills on her face, and from the way she carried herself she also had experience in physical combat. This plus her innate talents had made the Dread squadrons' commanding officer.

"The last time I saw her, she went barreling in that direction and crashed through that bulkheadâ€¦ ouch!"

Another woman said but was cut short as she glared at her comrade who was patching up her wound on the right arm. The woman's name was Barnette Orangello or simply Barnette; she was Jura's best friend and wing mate as they had been working together in the pirates for quite a long time ever since they joined up. And like her blonde friend she too had a well defined figure that would have made men drool like fountainheads, though she was slimmer and not asâ€¦ well formed as her blonde friend.

She wore a dress that showed all of her own well defined curves and swells to the fullest, this dress had an open front that displayed to top areas of her bosom's cleavage. Her hair was dark green and like her commanding officer Meia, her hair was cropped short and had a decorative hairpin as well. Her eyes were of deep violet, which had the look of purple silk.

But she had skills like her comrades in the arts of combat as she was a good hand to hand combatant and carried her own weapons, but at this point she was more concerned with the pain she felt.

"Watch it Paiway! My skin's very delicate you know."

She gave a frown as she watched the injury she had received when she along with the infiltration team entered the Ikazuchi. The burn was caused when one Tarak rifle round managed to bypass her suit's armor began to sting in pain and she knew that there would be a scar after



the wound would be healed. She then became a bit distraught as she realized that her perfect skin would now be permanently blemished.

"Just try to endure it for a bit longer."

The apprentice nurse replied as she resumed adding amounts of disinfectant to the wound. Nearby, several other pirates were sitting down and awaiting treatment.

"Nurses are supposed to be more sensitive to their patients." Barnette complained as she gritted her teeth at the feeling of the disinfectant spray on her skin.

"I am!"

Paiway assured. The young girl who served at the medical officer as was indicated by her nurse uniform, of the pirates was only eleven years old with long, dark purple hair, which were held in large ponytails that framed her head.

Duero took stock of her and saw that she wasn't good at what she was doing. He however could tell that she had the talent and promise to become better suited for the job she had, but she lacked the proper training and the knowledge to treat her patients effectively.

Part of Duero's mind halted him as he looked at the injured pirates, he knew what that urge was. As a graduate of the medical academy of his planet, Duero had been trained to follow the medics and doctors of the past. That was to provide medical treatment to any injured person. And while he was about to tend to the wounds of his world's enemies, he was not going to stand by and let them suffer more pain and injury, with that in mind, he made his move.

As the men were being herded through and forced to enter the escape pods, Meia went towards one of the holes in the walls. She then directed her attention to Jura and called out to her.

"Jura I'm going to look for Dita."

The blonde sighed. "This is one of the reasons why I didn't want to take a trainee with us on this raid in the first place."

"We're rather short-handed right now if you didn't know!" Meia shouted calmly and with restrained impatience. "If you didn't want to come along, then you should have said so back at the hideout."

"Oh all right! I'm coming along!"

As the two of them headed off to find their wayward companion, the last of the men were about to be moved towards the life boats, under the still watchful eye of the female pirates, however one the men had a plan in mind as he moved away from the column.

In yet another part of the Ikazuchi

Several Megele women arrived in the bridge and were now bare of their space suits and were in the sub bridge of the Ikazuchi and were busy extracting data from the core terminals.

At least one of them was at any rateâ€¦

One was a young woman who was dressed in what one could describe as house wife attire and she had a very kind and gentle demeanor about her, Ezra Viviel, or rather Ezra to her friends was normally part of the bridge crew and was not supposed to be in the front lines of the pirates' operations and never carried a weapon, as she was against unneeded violence. However, she did use one but only for her own personal protection and those she cared about. The other pirates would never ask her to be in the front lines and she was happy for it.

She was in the group in order to help with data retrieval along with Parfet Balblair, the head engineer of the ship, a short and spunky young woman who wore her hair in two large braids and wore an engineer's jumpsuit, along with a pair of large glasses that hid her eyes. The young engineer decided to help the gentle bridge officer with helping to keep an eye on the Tarak fleet using the Ikazuchi's still functional sensors and scanners. The young engineer however was not very happy as she was not able to use her Interpricko device, a special translation unit she had invented as it seemed that their team leader was already familiar with the language of the men.

Their leader was none other than Buzam A Calessa, a tall and statuesque woman with dark skin and silver hair all the way to the back of her legs and dressed in something that resembled a harem girl outfit, though in a far more futuristic sense. The woman in question was the best officer second to the Captain on the pirate group, she had already given the order for Meia to have the men dumped out into space in the life pods that were on the Ikazuchi. Once she was done with the extraction of data, she quickly contacted the Captain of their group.

"Captain, we've completed the data transfer and all the men have been removed from the ship."

"Good, how soon can you send in a team to explore the ship that the men had been after before we hit them BC?"

"It won't take too long, according to the data, the ship section is already docked with the Ikazuchi section we're currently in, all we need to do is have Parfet and several security personnel to go in and find a terminal, once we're there, she can use the translation device she has madeâ€¦I saw the ship or the section of a ship Captainâ€¦it's not one of the men, or that our world Megeleâ€¦but of a totally different design."

"I seeâ€¦well, we can't let the men have it, once you're ready, evacuate as fast as you can and take what you can from that section."

"Roger!"

"Thank you! I finally get to use my Interpricko deviceâ€¦but on a new ship! I wonder what data is in that ship?"

Parfet was in joy at the chance to take a look at the section of ship that the men had brought itâ€¦she had seen it earlier and wondered just who had built that particular vessel.

In the new sections of the Ikazuchi that had been releasedâ€|  
Damn those blasted females!!!! Damn all to the chaotic darkness!!!

The Prime Minister was deep in rage as he glared as the Megele pirate cruiser began to move in on the old section of the ship. He was still figuring out the best way to finally eliminate the women for this insult and to finally wipe them out permanently from the face of the universe. The male leader was angry not only at the humiliation of his fleet being bested by the women in only one shipsâ€|but the loss of the unknown UNSC frigate and what secrets it held that could further elevate the status of the men over the women made the humiliation even more bitter for him.

As he was told that all back-up information was retrieved, he then ordered the use of one of their newest weaponsâ€|powerful enough to wipe the women out for good.

"Prepare the Murasame Torpedoesâ€|target both the old section of the Ikazuchi and the Forward Unto Dawn!"

The Second in Command was even more stunned at that announcement as he voiced his complaints.

"Prime Minister! You can't be serious!! Do you actually intend to destroy the Ikazuchi that our people have labored many years to rebuild and improve on, along with the unknown ship that could hold information and technology that could be beneficial to Grand Pa?!"

I would rather have both destroyed by my own orders than to let them be in the hands of those disgusting pirates!!!

With that, the missile was now being locked in, towards both the former colony ship and the UNSC Frigate.

"Oh no! The Tarak fleet has locked in a missile right at us!' Ezra replied as she detected the radar lock on made by the men as they were getting ready to fire the Murasame Torpedoes. Buzam realized the dangers they were all in and quickly faced Parfet.

"Can you get the ship to Parfet?"

The head engineer looked over at the diagnostics of the ship's engines and systems using her Interpricko device as she was not skilled in the language of the men as Buzam was, as soon as she was done, she decided to tell the Commander that the engines were dead and no power was available.

"Sorry Commander, but the power to the engines is completely offline and the engines won't respond to any signal I send themâ€|this ship's dead in space."

"Captain!"

The captain of the pirates heard the message and replied to her commanding officer.

"I heard that BC, losing this day's catch and the bonus is a great shame, but better to be empty pocketed and alive, than full pocketed

and dead. Have all the crews evacuate form the area immediately, the ship will provide covering fire for extraction."

"Roger! Meia do you read? We're pulling out now!"

In the reactor roomâ€¦

"I understand Commanderâ€¦but I have to locate my apprentice pilot first, she was last seen in the reactor room. We'll head out as soon as we find her."

Meia then looked at the Dread her apprentice was flying in, she sighed and wondered if Jura was right in the bad idea of bringing the young girl with them on the raid, Dita had good skills, but was always so bubbly and had a very short attention span and always seemed to have her thoughts on other things.

"Where could she be? She should know better than to go around and leave her Dread behind in a place like this?"

"At least we know she was here Meia, though I've got no doubt she's doing something she's not supposed to again."

The blonde replied as she looked around while they were on the railings where the Dread was.

"What do you mean by that?"

That was when they heard a voice that they recognized as a man and both of them looked to see a young man carrying a strange thing in his arms and he was running away from something or someone, and the question as to who was chasing the man was answered as a certain redhead was seen.

"GET AWAY FROM ME!!!!"

"PLEASE COME BACK!!! I'M FROM A PEACEFUL RACE!! I WON'T HURT YOU!!!"

"WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE A WOMAN?!"

"BECAUSE I AM A NICE WOMAN!!!"

Meia couldn't help herself as she got angry at the sight of her apprentice pilot chasing after a man of all things when they were supposed to pull out immediately.

"Dita?!"

Jura sighed and gave her leader a sly look.

"I guess I was right after all wasn't I? She's chasing a man."

Meia sighed and took off to catch up with her apprentice, while Jura followed her, hoping that this whole wasted trip would soon end, all this running and the dust was messing up her hair and getting her body and dress dirty, plus she was beginning to sweat.

At the very same moment, the women began to launch out the life pods with the men inside of them, the women were pirates, they were not

like the Megele military forces who killed men on sight. However it seemed that not all the men were going into the capsules.

Duero looked over his last patient who was none other than Barnette Orangello, the young man had taken a different direction and took out a Tarak medic's trench coat and then told the women that he was a doctor, and that was very much true as he had been a high ranking graduate in the field of medicine. Though the women were in need of good medical care as despite her best intentions, Paiway was still a child, they were not very comfortable with the idea of a man touching them.

As he patched up the bandage and told the female that there was no danger of scarring, he took the time to study the emerald haired woman. He was quite surprised to see that instead of resembling the hideous monsters that he had seen in the films in his youth and growing upâ€the women looked humanâ€like himselfâ€though they did have some anatomical differences, namely in the chest region and the lower form, they didn't have the Adam's apple and their bodies were softer in a way. In that sense, rather than being frightened by the womenâ€the young man became intrigued.

Barnette then glared at him as she noted his intense examination of her form.

"What are you looking at? You found something that interests you?"

Duero smirked a bit and replied.

"Yes, in truth I do."

"Well don't expect any thanks at all from me!" Barnette said with a dark glare.

"I don't, now then, I'll take my leave."

Paiway however was not being idle as she was writing in her notebook the number of people that the male doctor had touched as she planned to have them all undergo the standard Megele decontamination treatment to kill all the male germs that they were exposed to when the man touched them.

"Soâ€he touched five womenâ€"

Her taking of notes however was cut short as the ship began to shake. Outside the Megele cruiser was firing it's beam cannons in order to slow down the Tarak forces and make sure that they bought enough time for the extraction of the crew.

The Captain nodded as the reports of the crew being evacuated from the area came to her ears, and she wished that they could hurry up, but they then got confirmation that the men had fired the missiles and the weapons were powerful enough to destroy the Ikazuchi and their ship in the process. The time to impact was 300 seconds and counting and the weapons were coated with some sort of beam deflecting film as their ship's beam bolts were rendered worthless against the weapons.

"BC, what's the status of the crew evacuation?"

"We've evacuated everyone else, but Meia's Dread team has not yet been able to call in and confirm their evacuation."

"We'll let them leave in their Dreads, get back here in the ship immediately!"

"Roger!"

In the reactor roomâ€|

Hibiki was running at full throttle and as far as his legs could carry him, the women were indeed scary and he wanted to be away from the red haired one as fast as he couldâ€|however, that was when a mass of debris suddenly exploded in front of him, forcing him to scream and try to stopâ€|

And as soon as the smoke cleared he sighed, but gulped as he found himself looking at the barrel of an assault rifle. He slowly looked upwards and gaped in shock and fear as he now found himself looking at a seven foot all armored giant of a man aiming a very odd but nevertheless deadly looking rifle at him. He saw his reflection on the golden visor that the armored giant had and felt a massive shiver run down his spineâ€|he couldn't tell if this new one was a machine or a human wearing armorâ€|but he was not going to try anything that would antagonize and make the giant shoot him. Hibiki Tokai was looking at a UNSC Spartan-II armed with a MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, a Combat Knife, two fragmentation grenades, and two M7 Caseless Submachine guns on his thighsâ€|a very intimidating sight for a 16 year old boy like him to face in one day.

When John had ducked from the explosion and the debris, the resulting forces had briefly made him lose his focus and the energy from the explosion had managed to jam his Mark VI's systems. Cortana was all right and he had to do a rapid manual reactivation of his Mark VI and when the systems were green light, he forced his way out of the debris that covered him, it was then that his motion sensors told him of an incoming unknown and he reacted in his normal military fashion and took out his assault rifle and waited for the smoke to clear so he could identify the would be aggressorâ€|

Only to find him aiming his weapon at a short 16 year old boy with a strange outfit and carrying what looked like a massive metal egg. The boy had a strange and wild hairstyle and seemed to be in a very big hurryâ€|he scanned the boy for a second and saw no visible or hidden weapons on him and he then spoke.

Hibiki gulped as the green and black armored giant looked at him intentlyâ€|maybe considering to blast him into a pile of unrecognizable pile of shredded meat with that weapon or to crush him with his bare handsâ€|those possibilities seemed more frightening than being followed by a womanâ€|he tensed a lot more and was sweating as the man spoke in a deep and strong voice.

"What's a 16 year old boy like you doing on a ship like this?"

Hibiki tried to think up an answer, and closed his eyes as he saw the giant moveâ€|only to hear a sound of metal on metal and he opened his eyes to see the giant placing it's weapon on it's back. He didn't

know what was going on and tried to answer, but he then looked behind him and saw the redhead again and he panicked. He turned and tried to run, but found himself colliding with the giant's armored body. He gulped once more and tried to leave, but the giant of a man placed a firm and powerful grip on the back of his shirt.

"Just where do you think you're going?"

"I'm running away from that monster!!! Let me go!!!"

The giant looked at him, cocking it's head to the side slightly and asked him.

"What monster are you talking about?" The Spartan felt a slight moment of unease as he thought, though no matter how absurd it might be, that a Flood Infection form was on this ship.

"WOW!!! ANOTHER ALIEN!!!!"

John turned and spotted a young redhead teenage girl with a camera. He blinked a bit as the girl took a picture of him. Before he could try and figure out what exactly was going on the young man panicked and shouted to him.

"Let me go!!! That monster is after me!!!"

"He's got to be kiddingâ€|that young girl's no monsterâ€|just what is going on here John?"

The Spartan heard Cortana ask him as she was confused as to what was going on here. They run into a boy who thinks women were monsters, and now they ran into a girl who thinks men were aliensâ€|just what in the name of Heaven was going on?!

"I wish I knew."

John responded back to his AI companion and close friendâ€|but then his motion sensors picked up two more unknown contacts approachingâ€|and sure enough, he spotted a aqua blue haired girl in a black, grey and white body suit appear and a blonde woman with one the most revealing dresses he had ever seen any woman wear in his life. That naturally made him feel some sensations in his body, he quickly placed those thoughts aside as he focused on trying to get some answers from any of them. He then dragged the young man back to meet up with the young womenâ€|maybe they could give answers.

Meia gasped and lifted her laser ring as she spotted the seven foot tall armored being that was in front of Ditaâ€|she didn't know what was going on but her training kicked in and she pressed the firing stud and out from the supposed jewelry came powerful laser beam, though not in the caliber of the heavier laser rifles they had, the bolt should be enough to slow the giant armored thing down for Dita to run.

"DITA!!! RUN!!!"

John saw the laser and quickly reacted as he released the boy and moved quickly to block the attack. The laser beam slammed into his Mark VI's shields and he was covered in rippling golden energy, the bolt didn't do that much damageâ€|it didn't even take an inch from

his shield gauge.

Meia was stunned on how fast the giant of a man move and get in front of Dita, but she was even more stunned as the laser bolt she fired was deflected away—it seemed that the armored giant was also armed with some sort of personal defense shield that was highly resistant to lasers. She heard Jura gasp also as the blonde saw the armored male before them.

John was about to ask what was going on when Cortana broke in.

"John!!! We've got to get moving fast—there's some sort of heavy missile coming to hit this ship! We need to get back to the Dawn and ride it out—hopefully the armor and hull will hold!"

The Spartan nodded and moved away, allowing Meia to collect her charge when Dita tried to go after both John and Hibiki. She then berated the young girl and after Dita apologized, they all quickly made their way to their Dreads as they needed to evacuate. Hibiki likewise found his Vanguard and quickly boarded it as the time continued to count down from 300 seconds to 150 seconds and the crew of the pirate ship were already out of the Ikazuchi.

However there were two problems, one was the fact that the young man didn't know how to pilot his Vanguard—and the redhead's Dread fighter was stuck in the wall—apparently several jagged pieces of metal had held the ends of her Dread tight and couldn't allow her to escape.

The Spartan was running back to the Frigate as fast as he could—but even he knew that time was against them all.

Hibiki tried his best to move the Vanguard, while Dita her best to try and free her Dread, Meia and Jura couldn't go anywhere and leave Dita so they stayed and hoped that somehow, their comrade could escape—though they both knew that they were already too late.

John saw all that yet had other concerns, namely the safety of Cortana and himself, but a massive bulkhead suddenly fell from the roof and headed towards the entrance he had taken. The Spartan moved and rolled away as the massive pile of metal blocked his exit and he rushed in and tried to remove the metal away, tossing the metal pieces aside as fast as he could.

"John! We're not going to make it!"

"We will!"

"I'm sorry—I'm so sorry I got us in this mess."

"You have nothing to be sorry about—don't give up on me now Cortana!"

"Please John—leave—save yourself!"

"No—I am NOT letting you go—ever! We go together—or we don't go at all!"

"Darn it! Move!!!"



"Please move!!!"

The cries from the Tarak youth, the young Megele girl, and from the UNSC AI and the Spartan was on the right moment when the Paeksis suddenly glowed brightly.

The pirate shipâ€

"We can't avoid a direct hit!" One of the Bridge crew declared as she tracked the missiles aimed at them.

"Hit or miss, it's our destiny." The old captain said as she prepared for the worst to occur as the torpedoes were too close for them to avoid.

The torpedoes slammed into the ship and the explosion consumed both the Ikazuchiâ€the Forward Unto Dawn and the Megele cruiser. The men saluted the destruction of the Ikazuchi and the UNSC Frigate and watched as the scanners told them that mass was being lost in a matter of seconds. The Prime Minister sighed and replied as the scene ended with the explosion faded away.

"The price was highâ€but we are now rid of those vile piratesâ€may chaos deal with them in the way that befits their crimes to all men of Tarak."

A sea of deep green filled his field of vision and he struggled to find any form of sure footing in this mass of green light that moved like water.

The Master Chief looked around to see where he was, but all he saw was a massive sea of green light that seemed to be beat like a human heart. He looked and saw the young boy he had met before, the young redhead, the blonde woman, and the aqua haired teen who had fired her laser ring at him. They too were screaming as they fell in the lakeâ€before he could do anythingâ€he heard another screamâ€a scream that sounded very familiar.

"JOHN!!! HELP ME!!!"

"PLEASE!!! Iâ€IT HURTS!!!"

He then felt that something was missing and then as he felt the back of his Mark VI helmetâ€he found to his horror that the data crystal chip that held Cortana was gone.

He searched everywhere for itâ€he made a promise to Sergeant Major Johnson, to himselfâ€and most of allâ€to Cortana, that he would never let her goâ€and now she was lost. He then spotted something glowing violet in the distance and quickly moved towards itâ€and spotted the data chip that held Cortana. He then saw it break apart and he tried to reach it, hoping that he didn't fail to save her.

Then to his surpriseâ€a human form appeared around the fragments of Cortana's shattering data crystal chip, the figure began to take more defined form and he saw that it had the same form Cortana had when she was in her holo-tankâ€and the human was shivering in pain and it cried out in Cortana's voice.

"DON'T LEAVE ME!!!"

The Spartan reached out and saw the human figure look at his direction and the figure had Cortana's eyes and face, relief and joy etched in her features the being he saw which was Cortana in human form reached out for him with an open hand and he reached out as well and only inches separated them

And then the entire scene faded into black.

To be continued

So how was the first chapter?

Not too shabby and might need some updates later, but this is it for now, though I have been having some problems due to so much activity in the house recently, so forgive me if I seem a little lost for the moment and this is a new project for me to do so expect that things will be a bit sketchy at first.

Don't worry though the Master Chief will see action soon enough and Cortana will be all right, despite the rather odd and strange situation you've read in fact this will make things in the VanDread universe a lot more spicy and interesting!

And if you think that Master Chief is somewhat OOC, then I'm merely following the advice of the game designers, as they said that the players of the Halo series are the ones who will make Master Chief's personality, and I wanted him to be a bit more human and open, though not too much, just enough to show that he is still a living, breathing, and feeling, person, than just a warrior.

On the next chapter the pirates, and the men of Tarak will get to see the UNSC Spartan in action, as the new additions to the Harvesters will make their appearance!

Here's a little taste of what is to come.

**\*\*Trailer:\*\***

Magno looked through the view screen as she felt a shiver run up her spine at the sight of the carnage that had just taken place in the span of a few minutes. She, Buzam, several of the security team members, Barnette, and Gascogne, their leader of the Register were stunned at the sight to think that one man could do this much damage.

The door opened and out came the Master Chief holding his MA5C in both hands the sight of the armored Spartan was enough to have the female security personnel raise their laser rifles and even their laser rings though many of them were shivering at the man's arrival even the normally calm and cool under pressure Buzam shook a bit as they gazed at the seven foot tall form of the Spartan.

Magno however gave the order for them all to stand down, after seeing the Mjolnir Mark VI in action and the man wearing the advanced combat suit, and what he was capable of she doubted that anyone in her crew could take this man head on. If he wanted to kill them all and

take over the shipâ€|he was more than capable enough of doing just that.

However, their fears were put to rest as the Spartan placed his MA5C on his back with a slight thump as the magnetic pads held the weapon in place, and saluted the elderly Captain and spoke in a very respectful tone.

"All hostiles have been eliminated ma'amâ€|the ship is secure."

It's all up to you, the readers to guess just what sort of enemy the Master Chief will be facing on the next chapter.

Comments and Reviews are a mustâ€|constructive and helpful critiques are also welcomeâ€|while flames will be kicked out the minute they are caught.

See you on Chapter 2 â€" Under new management.

### 3. Chapter 3

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: The series of Halo belongs to Bungie, and VanDread belongs to Gonzo, I am not part of either company and therefore am not being paid to write this particular story.

#### Chapter 2

Under New Management

/ Words \ : Thoughts

/ "Conversations"\ : Paeksis

-----

John was dreaming, seeing things that he thought he would have forgotten. His days of combat with the Covenant..seeing worlds glassed by the invaders, Marines being killed, or worseâ€|the deaths of his fellow Spartans, and the many things he had seen over years. His training on Reach, his friends Sam, Kelly, Linda, Fredric, Will, Johnson, the man who became like a father figure, CPO Mendez, and Dr. Catherine, who was like a mother to him and the other Spartansâ€|all of themâ€|he doubted he would ever see them again. But not everything revolved around combat and he recalled the few times Dr. Halsey would play word games with him, though why he never knew, and the times he had been forced to listen to Johnson's love for Flip music, though he never understood the man's love for it, he hardly complained.

He then recalled his meeting with Cortanaâ€|nearly two years before the attack on Reachâ€|he had to admit, even if he knew back then that she was an AI, he was surprised at how alike she was to Dr Halsey. He recalled being her protector for many battles, the battle on the Pillar of Autumn, On the first Halo Ring, on the Ascendant Justice, the Cairo Station, New Mombasa, Delta Halo, and in High Clarity, where he had to leave her behindâ€|then he recalled his battles into the Flood Infested Covenant Capital City to find her. He then recalled his promise to Johnson as the Sergeant Major died, to never

let go of her no matter whatâ€|and he would keep that promise no matter the cost.

He then recalled the words he had with her when he found her still in High Clarity after he and the Arbiter fought their way through the city. He saw how much the AI was in pain and how sad she was, he might not always show it, but seeing her in that state made him sad, and guilty for leaving her behind without any form of protection.

"\_You found meâ€|but so much of me is wrongâ€|.out of placeâ€|you may be too late.\_"

"\_You know meâ€|when I make a promise.\_"

"\_Youâ€|keep itâ€|I do know how to pick them.\_"

"\_Lucky meâ€|do you still have it?\_"

Cortana looked a lot better now as she stood up and it made him feel better to see his friend up and having her old personality back, as she revealed the Index that she had held onto when they were in the first Halo.

"\_The Activation Index from the first Halo ringâ€|a little souvenir I hung ontoâ€|just in case.\_"

"\_Got an escape plan?\_"

"\_Thought I'd try shooting my way outâ€|mix things up a little.\_"

He took out her data crystal chip, he had hung onto it for as long as he could, and now with it in hand, he welcomed her back. As she downloaded herself back into the data crystal chip, she smiled a bit and spoke in her usual but somewhat softer tone.

"\_Just keep you're head downâ€|there's two of us in here nowâ€|remember\_."

As he opened his eyesâ€|he found himself somewhereâ€|a white mass and he couldn't see anything at first, then the place changed as he saw that he was in a large field of green grass, hills, and a clear blue skyâ€|almost like when he was back on Reach, he then felt someone nearby and turnedâ€|

To see Cortanaâ€|but not in her construct form, there was no data streams on her or was she in her usual blue-violet shadeâ€|but she in human size and height, had human skin and flesh, wearing clothes and she looked at him with a smile on her face, and she spoke to him as she reached out to him.

"What are you waiting for?"

The scene faded as blackness flooded his mind.

-----

Hibiki saw himself fighting his way through the crowds of men towards a great light hoping to see what else was beyond this life, he wanted to see if there was something more in life than just doing what he

had been doing back on Tarak, he pushed and shoved his way past the human male figures and didn't mind if he didn't see their faces. As soon as he reached the stage beyond however his movements were blocked as a massive crystal came out of the ground he saw himself, and he was then surrounded by more of the crystals, he then saw the figures of three females, the very same ones who had fallen along with him in the sea of green light, but their faces were obscured, but he quickly recognized the redhead as the one he met before.

But he was not about to stop and ran past them and climbed upward the cliff.

"Don't get in my way!!!"

He moved on and finally reached the location and reached the last handhold of the cliff and hauled himself upwards to see what was there, but found himself looking in the same field of green light and two objects approaching, he then saw a massive robotic figure in glowing light fire something at the torpedoes and everything then faded into white.

-----

The silence of space was broken as a massive portal opened and out came the Megele Cruiser, the Ikazuchi, and the sill attached and amazingly enough the still intact hull of the UNSC Frigate the Forward Unto Dawn. And the ship seemed to still be intact as it was undamaged by the explosion of the Murasame Torpedoes. The ships seemed to be very much out of power and there seemed to be no activity in any of them.

The aged captain, one Magno Vivian by name shook her head as she looked about, and was amazed to see that instead of being in the afterlife, she was still in the command bridge of her ship and still breathing, and she saw that the same could be said for the members of her bridge crew, namely Belvedere Coco, a young blonde with short hair and Amarone Slatheav, a dark skinned girl who wore her long hair in hoops and braids.

The two girls seemed all right and no worse for wear and that was a good thing in her book, and she decided to look at the bridge of her ship to see just how the ship had fared, it seemed that it was relatively intact and yet there seemed to be some sort of crystal growth on them.

"Ugh this certainly isn't the afterlife what happened and tell me what's going on."

"Just a moment captain the systems seem to be"

WHAM!!!!

Belvedere had no time to finish her report when a massive thump hit their ship and a deep green glow flooded the bridge of their cruiser, they were surprised and looked up to see a very much unexpected sight.

The Ikazuchi was being covered by the Paeksis as the crystal power source had unleashed a massive amount of itself all over the area and

had latched on the Megele ship.

Magno looked on in shock at the sight as she had not expected that the Paeksis would actually do what it was doing to her ship.

"What is that crystal trying to do?! Is it trying to consume our ship?!"

However, the Megele cruiser was not the only one that was being covered by the Paeksis. The Paeksis also covered the UNSC Frigate the Forward Unto Dawn and it began to meld with the UNSC Frigate. The ship was freed from it's moorings and the crystal cocoon covered ship was being moved towards the bottom of the Ikazuchi and several large amounts of floating debris were being gathered left and right by the crystal to begin what appeared to be some sort of fusion and transformation process. The Frigate apparently was being studied, reconfigured, and fused with the section of the Colony ship and while the Megele cruiser was being brought closer to the Ikazuchi, the crystal also began to create arms on the ship, reaching out to gather more and more of the floating parts and debris in the area. And within the colony ship things were rapidly changing as it's data core began to fuse with both that of the Megele ship and that of the UNSC Frigate.

-----

In the reactor room

The entire place was filled with crystals from top to bottom and the floor was as well, and things seemed to be quiet several Vanguards were also found to be covered by crystals and pillars of the crystals were everywhere.

And it seemed that several people were there as well. The aqua haired Dread pilot leader moved a bit and looked for her comrades she then spotted her blonde comrade Jura as the blonde began to wake up.

"Jura! Are you all right?"

The blonde groaned a bit as she moved and opened her eyes and then replied to her leader's question as she also looked around and was happy to note that she was very much alive and breathing.

"I think so I don't feel any different."

Meia sighed in relief and shook her head a bit to clear out a few of the lights that flashed in her eyes, but that was when she recalled that she and Jura were not the only ones who had been in the chamber when the explosion occurred, along with the things she saw.

"Dita!"

"Hi! Over here!"

Meia turned and gave a look of relief to find the excitable redhead still alive and waving at her. Dita then lay back down on the floor and made several comments with awe as she recalled what had happened in the moments that occurred when she saw a massive flash of

light.

"Something went beepâ€|then VROOM!!! I don't know what happenedâ€|but alien powers are so amazing!"

Meia got to her feet and looked around, and while she said nothing, she was in awe at the sight of the crystals everywhere, she turned and spotted the man that Dita had been chasing, flat on the ground and appeared to be unconscious yet alive, as his breathing could attest, and next to him was the strange robot that she had seen him carrying earlier.

Another thing registered on her mind and she decided to look around, just in case the armored giant she had seen earlier was in the areaâ€|even if she had seen just how effective her laser ring was on the armored man's body suit and it's shield, she was not going to let thatâ€|man harm her comrades. With that in mind, she aimed her arm forward with the laser ring and looked aboutâ€|

She did not see the armored maleâ€|but saw somethingâ€|or rather someone elseâ€|

A womanâ€|who appeared to be naked.

Meia gasped as she ran forward to find out just who this person was. As soon as she arrived, she turned the woman over and studied the person.

She appeared to be of considerable heightâ€|maybe 6'1 and appeared to be highly athletic, considering her slim but strong build. She had short brown hair and had a very attractive faceâ€|almost like those of the ramp models she had seen on her younger days on Megele. The woman had muscles in her whole body and all those were perfectly proportioned so they accentuated her female form very well. Not to mention her bust size was considerableâ€|not too large or too small, but perfect for her form and height. ()

Meia wondered who this person was, she had never seen her before and despite her youth, she knew just about everyone in the piratesâ€|and she was not one of them, and she wondered if she had been a prisoner on the male ship, though that would have been absurd as the men would not take prisoners at all. She checked her pulse and found her to have a strong healthy pulse, and she checked her breathing, and found her to be breathing in normally. She moved back as the woman opened her eyesâ€|to reveal her irises to be deep bluish purple.

"Jâ€| "

"Who are you?"

"Joâ€| "

"Please take it easyâ€|my name is Meia Gisbornâ€|who are you?"

"Johâ€| "

"Please calm down and answer meâ€|who are you and what are you doing here?"

"John?"

"Who is John? Who are you talking about?"

"Don't leave me."

"What are you saying?"

The woman closed her eyes once more and Meia began to get even more worried as she looked the woman over for any possible injuries and thankfully found none, but that certainly didn't mean that she didn't have any possible internal injuries at all. She looked and found her communicator as Jura and Dita arrived, and both of them were stunned to see the strange woman.

"Who is she Meia?" The blonde asked her leader.

"I don't know but she needs help fast."

The aqua haired woman took her communicator and made a call.

"This is Meia, I need some clothes and medicine here on the double, and make sure to have Paiway with you."

As the Paeksis continued it's work

Magno realized that with what had happened, she needed to go to the source of the sudden changes herself to assess the situation, she had heard from Buzam that the crystal corrosion had spread through the ship, Gascogne had reported that her crews could not free the ship, even with their lasers, and Parfet had reported that there was no way for them to activate the ship's engines. She had then received Meia's call and had brought Paiway along with her medical satchel.

As they arrived, she was in awe at what she saw as she stepped out of the shuttle along with the small force she had brought with her.

"Amazing of all the things I thought I'd see, this wasn't one of them."

As she walked and descended down the ramp, Meia stepped forward as Dita and Jura, as the young woman bowed and spoke in a sad tone.

"I'm really sorry that you have to come all the way out here Captain."

"No need to fret Meia, this was something that I needed to see for myself, the Paeksis was an amazing power source but this was not one of the things I heard that it was capable of doing to a ship let alone what it's doing now"

The elderly woman then turned and spotted none other than Hibiki Tokai, who was still very much unconscious at the moment, and next to the Tarak youth was the small robot which still had static on it's view screen. The woman looked on as Meia decided to tell the Captain what had happened and who this person was.



"This was the man that Dita was chasing when we came here in the Paeksis chamber to look for her."

"I seeâ€¦It's been quite a long time since I've seen a man, let alone a young one, but I certainly don't recall their faces looking this funny before."

"Forgive me Captain, but there's more, we found a woman here as well, alive but very weakened for some reason, she was not wearing any clothes when I found her in this chamber, and she seemed to be delirious."

Magno turned and followed Meia as she let the older woman and the group to where she, Meia, and the Jura had taken the woman, one of the security members handed a blanket to Meia as soon as they arrived and they saw the woman lying down, still alive and breathing.

"You found her here, on the male ship?"

Buzam was very surprised as there had been no reports of any female prisoners onboard the Ikazuchi when they had attacked and took over the old section. To suddenly find a woman here in the male ship right after the explosion was very, very odd indeed.

"We didâ€¦we were stunned to find her, she doesn't appear to be a prisoner of the men as she has no injuries that we sawâ€¦though she might have internal ones."

"Hmmâ€¦she's very strong looking, not someone to look down onâ€¦did you get her name?"

"I'm afraid not Captainâ€¦all she said before she slipped back into unconsciousness was 'John don't leave me' I have no idea who this John is at all."

The captain was intrigued by that bit of information.

"That's not very surprising to meâ€¦There's a reason why that name is not familiar to you Meia, that is an old Earth name given to men."

"A man's name?"

The other women were stunned at that announcement and they all looked at the woman as Meia wrapped the offered blanket on the woman, they then noted that as soon as she was done with that part, the aqua haired woman aimed her laser ring into the shadows, as if expecting an attack of some sort.

"What's the problem?" Gascogne asked the Dread Squadron leader.

"We ran into another person when we chased Ditaâ€¦when Jura and I turned at a corner, we spotted a massive armored being holding that man and walking towards Ditaâ€¦I fired my laser ring at him, but it didn't work on him at all."

"That's true!" Jura added.

"I saw Meia's laser just break down as it hit the man in armor and a

golden wave of light showed itself around him! It was rather scary."

"Where is he then?"

The women got their answer as they heard loud footsteps coming to the side nearby and spotted a massive figure looking at them, when they turned their lights, they spotted a man wearing a green and black colored armor suit and wielding a strange but deadly looking weapon in both his hands. The armor concealed everything and they couldn't see his face as the lights they had reflected on his golden visor.

"What the?!"

"By Grand Ma! Look at him!"

The women backed away a bit and aimed their laser weapons at the man—or whatever that being was as he looked back at them. The women of Megele were now finding themselves looking at one of the UNSC's finest warriors apart from the Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, the Spartan II, and the most famous of them all—Master Chief Petty Officer John-117. Magno was stunned as well as the others as she moved back a bit—something about the armored man was rather intimidating to her and she was curious as to who this person was—their data didn't indicate that the men had soldiers like him on the ship when they attacked.

John looked at the women and studied them carefully, not making a move as he was not here to start hostilities. Having been a soldier for all his entire life and growing up as a Spartan, he knew professional soldiers when he saw them, and while the women armed with the rifles were showing signs of combat experience, they were not professional soldiers, and they were not militia as well. Not to mention the apparent lack of any military grade armor on them. He knew that they were not military since there was no way any well trained, equipped, disciplined, and paid soldier would go anywhere without any form of protection. Some of the women were dressed in very outlandish clothes, including the blonde and the redhead. The clothes were fine on civilians, but certainly not for soldiers, though he could tell that the clothes could catch a man's eye easily. They resembled civilians more than military personnel in the eyes of the battle hardened Spartan.

He however was more concerned for locating Cortana, when he had recovered his senses, he was able to free himself and began to search for Cortana and her data crystal chip as the device had apparently been loosened from his helmet. He had been looking for it when he heard voices and climbed over the pile of debris that blocked his way to the objective when he spotted the group below. The Spartan then placed his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle on the back and the people heard a slight clash of metal on metal as the weapon was held by the magnetic pads on the Mark VI. He then leaped downwards—stunning the women and they recoiled backwards as he landed on the ground and a massive crash was heard, the crystals below were crushed and the metal buckled under the strain.

Magno and the women were stunned to see the man place his weapon on his back and leaped down towards them, the reason for this was the fact that it was nearly two and a half stories from the pile to the

floor and the man just leaped off. They all aimed their weapons right at him as he stood upâ€revealing himself to be at least 7 feet tall. The sight of this man in armor jumping off the two and a half story high pile of debris and standing up as if it was nothing but a simple skip was very scary. The only one among the women who was not frightened by the events was none other than Dita Liebel who was in awe at the new alien's powers and abilitiesâ€she wondered what sort of other abilities he had, apart from being able to create energy shields to deflect lasers, as Meia had said.

"He has some sort of energy shielding system that makes him highly resistant to lasers built into that armor suit of hisâ€be very carefulâ€"

The Spartan however was not concerned with them, their weapons would not stop him, but they were human and were not his enemy and he would not attack them, he then turned as he spotted another woman, who was awoken and had turned towards himâ€and to his absolute shock, the person looked like Cortana, he ignored the women and their weapons and made his way to the person and as he got closer to her, his shock grew as it was indeed Cortana and not some sort of trick. He looked at Cortana and couldn't believe that she was nowâ€human.

"Cortanaâ€is that you?"

The woman's eyes widened a lot as she seemed to finally be able to see him, her voice came out and it was certainly the AI's voice he was hearing, not someone else's.

"Johnâ€what happened to meâ€I feelâ€weirdâ€and I."

She gasped as she looked at herself.

Cortana was stunned to suddenly see her armsâ€and they were not in her normal formâ€but human flesh and blood, there was no data streams or any coloration that she normally had, just healthy human skin and flesh. She looked at her hands and arms, she felt her body underneath the blanketâ€trying her best to figure out what was going on and whether all that she was feeling and seeing was real.

She looked at the Spartan's visor and saw her faceâ€her human face.

"Iâ€Iâ€I'mâ€I'm human?! But howâ€when did thisâ€happen?! What's this feeling I haveâ€I feel so weakâ€"

"Cortana!"

John felt some measure of panic when she closed her eyes and seemed to fall back into unconsciousness, she placed her scanners on her and found that she apparently fainted and it was due toâ€hunger and thirst. It seemed that not only did the AI somehow wind up with a human bodyâ€but she also had the same needs of a human being as well.

He was very concerned right now for her safety but seeing as he would need help to tend to his friend, he decided to weigh his options, he could try and tend to Cortana himself, but he had no idea as to what had happened on the ship ever since the explosion and he had no means

of transportation or had any of the needed supplies, and the next, while completely against UNSC combat protocol concerning unknown contacts, was to ask for help from the unknown people, they apparently had supplies, equipment, transportation, and more, but it too had risks, there was no guarantee they might take Cortana hostage and harm her, or they could use her as a bargaining chip for him to reveal UNSC military secrets, or Earth's location.

Despite his loyalty to the chain of command however, he was not going to let any harm come to Cortana and as he saw her weakened condition he made his choice.

He turned and faced the pirates and spoke to them.

"I am not here to fight you, I'll put down my weapons and consent to be your prisoner in exchange take care of Cortana until she recovers and do not harm her."

Magno looked at the man and she considered her options in this situation, the man could be lying and could be waiting for them to lower their weapons, and when they would do that, he might attack them. She could tell from the condition of some sections of his armor suit that he had seen combat, and the way he moved showed that he knew how to fight, plus the weapons he had on his armor made him a great danger to her crew if they lower her guard. That was when she decided to call his bluff.

"We'll help her, but you'll need to give us ALL of your weapons, and you have to be restrained, if you harm any of my crew, then your friend's safety is no longer my concern, I don't want to do anything rash to her, but that is up to your cooperation, do you agree with my terms?"

John looked at the elderly woman and saw that despite her age, she was strong willed and determined, almost like the daughter of his former Commander Jacob Keyes, Miranda was not the kind to be forced back by anyone and he respected that quality well, many of his Spartan comrades had it, and so did many of the UNSC Marines, especially Sergeant Major Avery J Johnson.

"You're the Captain ma'am?"

"Yes, why, I'm not what you expected?"

"I meant no offense by that question ma'am, I'll do as you ask."

John proved his point as he removed his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, activated the safety switch and placed the weapon on the floor, he then took off both his M7 Caseless Submachine Guns and did the same and placed both weapons alongside the MA5C and then took out his Fragmentation grenades, checked their safeties and placed them on the floor, and finally took out his Combat Knife and placed that too with his weapons. He then placed both his hands forward to prove that he was willing to be restrained.

Magno looked at the man, amazed that he didn't try to argue with her deal, it seemed that he was very concerned for the woman's safety and was willing to comply with the demand she made without any argument. He carried himself in a very serious, efficient, and professional

mannerâ€|showing that he was a highly trained soldier. She then nodded to Buzam and the woman moved and took out a pair of Megele manacles while under the watchful eye of the security personnel. She looked at the Spartan's wrists and made the right adjustments and tightened the strength of the manacles to be safe. She then placed the manacles on the wrists of the Spartan, and Gascogne walked over and the strong woman then carried the still sleeping woman named Cortana.

Several of the security members then took the weapons and made sure to not mess with them and the others flanked the Spartan, with Buzam leading them. As the group moved out to the rest of the ship that was still not being transformed by the Paeksis, they also made sure to take Hibiki and the robot with them. The Spartan then did a silent check on his Mjolnir and was surprised to find some rather unique changes to it's systems, but decided to put it aside for the moment as there would be plenty of time to do his work on the Armor. Despite the manacles and the lack of weapons on the armored maleâ€|many of the security personnel were still very wary around the 7 foot tall male in the Mjolnir Mark VI, and even Buzam was keeping a wary eye on him.

Only two women wanted to get closer to the Spartan, the first among them was Parfet because she wanted to figure out what sort of armor was the Mjolnir Mark VI as she had never seen it's design before and wondered what it was capable of doing. And the other was naturally Dita, as she was still intrigued by the Spartan and also wanted to see how Hibiki was doing.

-----

In a cell on the male side of the shipâ€| a few minutes laterâ€|

"Don't make fun of me! The name's Hibiki Tokai! And I am no mere Third Class Citizen!"

Hibiki was not in a very good mood, as he had awakened from a very strange and confusing dream and now found himself in another new cell. He was even made more angry as he was being questioned by none other than the young 1st Class Citizen Tarak Academy Graduate Duero McFile. Apparently the young man had to be with the rest of the Megele crew when it was discovered that the last life pod had already been launched.

"I know you, you're the one who made quite the mess in the ceremony, just how did you manage to get on the ship and past security?"

"There's so many darn questions todayâ€|"

"So you're name's Hibiki Tokai huh?"

Hibiki looked and gulped as he then found himself staring back at the Spartan who had been aiming that weapon at him only a few minutesâ€|or hours before, he didn't know. He was surprised that he was along with them, and bare of any of his weapons, despite the fact that he was unarmedâ€|the mere sight of him was enough to intimidate Hibiki, but not for longâ€|

"Yeah, that's my name, anyway"

The conversation was stopped when the Tarak youth saw the robot he had carried with him begin to shake and move, and then the robot suddenly sprouted both arms and legs and the static on it's screen was replaced by two large eyes, the robot then began to look around scratch it's head with it's fingers.

"Where am I? Who am I?"

Hibiki looked at the robot and was dumbfounded by the transformation.

"You've changed a bit, haven't you?"

"Huh?"

Duero then looked at the armored Spartan and was intrigued like the elder Captain, he could tell that the man in the armor suit was a consummate professional soldier. He then decided to find out just who this new man was.

"And you are?"

John-117 considered not answering the man's question, but seeing that he had nothing better to do until he was sure that Cortana was all right, he decided to stick to only giving his name, rank, and number as was standard UNSC Marine protocol.

"United Nations Space Command Navy, Master Chief Petty Officer, John-117."

"John-117? That's a rather odd name."

"You asked now do I get to ask something?"

"What is it?"

"What is going on here? Why are men and women fighting each other, when they are on the same race?"

Duero then decided to tell the Master Chief as to what was the situation between the people of his home-world and that of the women. The Spartan said nothing as he listened to the doctor, this was his best chance to find out just what was the deal with the situation that he and Cortana had just found themselves in. And he then wondered how Cortana was right now, he hoped that the elderly woman would keep her part of the agreement that he made with her.

-----

In the Register

"Wow! We're connected from the inside now Miss Gasco!"

One of the female crew members said as Gascogne was back in the Register and doing what she could to stop the Paeksis from consuming the entire ship completely. The head supply officer sighed as she saw the state of the ship and her Register.

"Well, that settles itâ€¦I never knew that the Paeksis had this much energy and powerâ€¦and by the wayâ€¦"

The woman then glared at the young woman who had green hair and then spoke, scaring the young bridge crew member.

"It's not Gascoâ€¦it's Gascogne!"

It became apparent that the head supplier was not very accepting of the nick name that every other woman on the ship had given her.

-----

Parfet was giving out several more orders to her fellow engineers as they tried their best to get the Paeksis under control as the crystals continued to spread all throughout the ships, including the unknown ship that the men had taken before. The head engineer then called out for the insertion of Linestar particles into the main cables in order to get some measure of control to the energy flow of the Paeksis.

She had hoped to examine the Mjolnir Mark VI, but had to do this first before that as she was needed by the others to stop the corrosive spreading of the Paeksis and to get the ship under control.

-----

Bart Garsus gulped as he was led towards the exit by Meia Gisborn, the cowardly Tarak cadet had been able to leave the statue that he had been hiding in ever since the attack on the Ikazuchi and had been exploring the hanger, but had been scared by a collapsing piece of debris and he was about to crawl away and then found himself staring at Meia's laser ring.

He now found himself a prisoner of the women.

-----

In the De-contamination Roomâ€¦

Barnette was hitting the glass door as hard as she could as she and several other women were stripped to their under-garments and were being decontaminated by Paiway, though the fact was, that the Megele way to decontaminate themselves was by being soaked in freezing water. However, it was then that Paiway left the area to deal with another matter.

-----

Laterâ€¦in the Medical Bayâ€¦

Cortana opened her eyes and groaned a bit as a strange feeling of need was felt in her now human body. Though the former UNSC AI Construct had no idea as to how she had gotten a human body, she tried to get used to itâ€¦and right now, she felt these cravings for something that she still couldn't understand, she opened her eyes and looked around to find herself in some sort of facility and on a bed,

she then tried to lift herself up and look around, she then found herself to be wearing some sort of tank top to cover her considerable bust and then she turned and spotted a young girl who appeared to be dressed in some sort of maid outfit, and the young girl was carrying a tray of food and a glass of water.

"Here, you should eat some food, the scanners said that you're fineâ€¦just exhausted from not eating and drinking anything."

Cortana slowly reached out with her new human hands and took a sandwich from the tray that the young woman had placed on a nearby table, she looked at the sandwich carefully, along with her hands and then felt the same gnawing feeling in her belly.

I must be feeling that urge called hungerâ€¦so this is what hunger feels likeâ€¦no wonder the Marines eat the way they do when they get back from the fighting.

Cortana opened her mouth and bit the sandwich and chewed the food carefully, allowing the bread, meat, cheese, and vegetables to be tasted by her new taste buds. She moved the food in her mouth, trying to get used to all the new sensations that flooded her mind as she chewed and then swallowed the bit of the sandwich she had taken.

The former AI always had a curiosity as to what it was like for humans to be able to do the things they did and to feel as well, though this was only a simple curiosity and yet, she was actually doing it now and it felt very unique to her. As she felt the food settle in her new human stomach, she felt the satisfaction of eating and therefore she resumed to finish the sandwich, she took in bite after bite slowly as to savor each newâ€¦humanâ€¦sensation she was feeling and took great care to remember it all as she felt them. As she was still very hungry, it didn't take long for her to finish the tray of sandwiches she had been given. She took the glass of waterâ€¦and slowly drank the glass, savoring the feel, temperature, and taste of the spring waterâ€¦as this was the first time she had ever tasted water or any drink of any sort.

As soon as she was done, she placed the glass down and sighed a bit, getting used to the feeling of being full and quenched of thirst. She then looked at the young girl.

"Thanks for the foodâ€¦uh, what's your name?"

"My name's Paiway, Paiway Underberg, and what's your name?"

Cortana thought it over and replied.

"My name is Cortana."

Paiway noted the name and was a bit confused as she had heard no family name, as every woman she knew, including her best friend Dita Liebely, so like any precocious eleven year old girl, she decided to ask.

"You don't have a family name?"

"Nâ€¦not right now as I recallâ€¦my name's been Cortana for a long



time now. Waitâ€|where am I? What am I doing here?"

The door opened and in walked Buzam, flanked by several more security members, armed with laser rings and laser rifles, the tall silver haired woman then walked over to Cortana and answered her questions.

"You're in our Medical Bay as we have managed to gather enough energy to keep the place operational despite the current mess we're in, and as to what you are doing here, you were taken here for treatment, in exchangeâ€|you're companion John agreed to be our prisoner."

"John's a prisoner?!"

That statement did not sit well with the former UNSC AI as she had been wondering where he was after she had awakened to find herself completely human. There was no way she was going to allow any harm to come to the Spartan, despite the fact that she knew that with the long years of combat he had, and the training he had undergone in Reach as a child and naturally his augmentations, John-117 was more than capable of taking care of himself.

"He did so willingly, he didn't argue with the Captain and we currently have him locked up in a cell with the other men we have on this ship. He has not been harmed, that much I can assure you Cortana."

Cortana sighed with relief and then looked at Paiway, she was curious as to what was the role of the young girl on this ship.

"What are you supposed to be anyway Paiway?"

"Me? Can't you tell, I'm a nurse, this is a standard Megele nurse uniform."

Cortana was surprised as she could tell that the girl was barely in her early teens, why was she in such a very complex and serious position?

"Aren't you a little too young to be a nurse?"

"What's my age got to do with it?"

Buzam decided to cut in as she had a lot of things to take care of and the last thing that they needed on the ship right now were distractions. She then called both the attentions of Cortana and Paiway.

"I'll explain to you what is happening as we go Cortana, you need to come with us as proof to you're companion that we have kept our side of the bargain, besides that, Captain Magno would like to talk to the two of you, you two are not from around here from the way you act, therefore, I'll explain things to you along the way."

-----

Laterâ€|

"Hey, let me see if I can fix you up."

Hibiki said to the small robot and the robot reacted very appropriately as it glared and spoke in an angry voice.

"Don't say that! I am not broken!"

Hibiki's retort was cut short with the arrival of Buzam and several of the security forces, the young man and Duero looked at their captors. The Tarak medic was somewhat surprised to see at least a dozen heavily armed women in the group and wondered why there were that many as there were only three of them in this prison cell, then he realized that the security personnel were not there for him or Hibiki, but for the Master Chief.

The women began to laugh as Hibiki commented if they were going to kill them and eat their livers, even Buzam managed a smile, but one woman who the two men didn't recognize gave the young boy a glare and snorted.

"That has got to be the worst form of description of women kid, just who told you that sort of garbage anyway?!"

Hibiki and Duero looked to see a tall woman wearing a tank-top of some sort, had short brown hair, pants, boots, fingerless gloves covering her hands, and a vest of some sort. Both the pants and tank top hugged her frame well showing off her curves and swells nicely, plus the muscles in her body were well shown, making it clear that she was not one to be taken lightly. ()

The new woman then turned to face their comrade in green and black armor and instead of glaring at the Spartan, she smiled at him, relief in her face.

"How are you holding up John?"

Inside his armor and behind his helmet/visor, the Master Chief was relieved to see Cortana to be up and about and had to admit, the clothes she had suited her very well. He then replied with a bit of Spartan language and made a smile on the front of the helm with his fingers and replied.

"I'm fine, you seem much better now yourself."

"Heyâ€|why are you talking to that woman, don't you know she might eat you're liver too?!"

Cortana gave Hibiki a very irate glare and replied.

"That's disgusting!!! John and I have worked together for a long time, and there's no way I would try and harm himâ€|so shut it kid."

Buzam looked at the exchange and saw that Cortana was indeed serious about saying that she and thisâ€|John had been partners for a very long time and had a great deal of trust and respect towards each other. She sighed and then mentioned to them all that they were going to be take to the Captain for questioning. She then turned and spoke to Cortana.

"We're about to deactivate the bars, so please make sure you're

friend doesn't try anything to the crew."

Laterâ€¦

As the group made their way to the room where the elderly Captain was going to meet them, the women who were heavily armed were behind both the Spartan and Cortana, still in unease at the sight of the massive 7 foot tall and armored male, they were also stunned at Cortana as she seemed to be totally at ease with the massive Spartan, and wondered if what they heard was true about Cortana, that she had been working with this man for many years.

"I've just managed to hear the history of the women Johnâ€¦and it's just weird, what did we get ourselves into here? And why does that kid think any woman would eat a man's liverâ€¦the thought of it is disgusting!"

"You should try hearing the men's side of the story Cortana, I'm having trouble understanding it too."

"No thank you John, I'd rather not get into that right now. I don't want to know what they taught their kids about women."

The two then noted that Hibiki was commenting on the breasts and the butt of the women and from what they could see, the kid was about to touch on the security personnel'sâ€¦wellâ€¦posterior.

John knew for a fact that no woman, either civilian or military would tolerate such an immodest actionâ€¦and Cortana knew enough about human etiquette and behavior that Hibiki was about to do something that was considered very improper back on any UNSC world and the two of them knew the results of that as well.

"I wouldn't do that if I wereâ€¦"

However they were too late as Hibiki touched the young girl's posterior and naturally the girl turned around and gave Hibiki a very unfriendly glare and she then lashed out and shouted.

"WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING?!?!?!?"

SLAP!!!

Both Spartan and former UNSC AI looked at the scene and finished their combined comment.

"â€¦Never mind."

-----

Laterâ€¦

"Owwâ€¦why did she have to hit me that hard?"

Hibiki complained as the Tarak youth was sitting down and trying to relieve the pain as he had a large hand print in red on his cheek. Behind them, the young girl that he had touched on the posterior was looking away with a look of absolute disgust on her faceâ€¦while her companions were looking at then men.

"You should know that it's impolite to do that to a woman."

The robot said in a reprimanding tone, that did little to help the Tarak teen understand just what was going on here so the two once more get into a slight argument, while The Spartan merely observed, with Cortana sitting beside John and observing the people before them. The two of them had each learned the culture and history behind the all male planet and the all female planet respectively and the current conflict between the two cultures and they were still baffled by the whole thing.

The door opened and in walked Meia still keeping Bart as her prisoner. The moment the Spartan and the former UNSC AI spotted the young Tarak cadet, they could immediately tell that the young man was not a soldier, let alone someone who should be anywhere in the front lines of combat, he might get himself and others killed. The Spartan and the UNSC AI merely looked on and watch just what was going to be the outcome of this discussion between the two cultures.

The situation ended when the doors opened and in came none other than Captain Magno Vivian herself as she looked over the numbers of people that were before her, and when she spotted the young Hibiki and Duero, she snorted in disappointment.

"Well I was expecting men, but instead we wind up catching a bunch of kids."

The robot then leaped towards the older woman and began to speak.

"It's interrogation time! I'll be ready to tell you everything I know at the moment."

Magno looked and smiled at the little robot and replied.

"Well, well, It's been quite a long time since I've seen a Navi-robot, let alone a fully functional one."

"You seem rather familiar with this ship and it's technology, I find it odd that an elderly woman such as you would know much about this ship since this has been on Tarak for nearly an entire century." Duero asked the elderly woman.

"That's right! How can an old hag like you know about the Ikazuchi?!" Hibiki asked Magno.

The elderly pirate glared at the young man and gave her answer with a slight smirk.

"I'll have you know young man, that this ship that you claim to be you're world's personal property was actually part of a colonization fleet that took off from Earth countless years ago, a century in fact, and this was before you're fathers were ever born, but then you're cowardly and sneaky grandfathers stole this section of the ship at the dead of night and took it with them."

"That is correct, they overhauled this section and added living quarters as well, so this was not intended to be battle-ship but a colonization vessel." The robot finished the explanations.

Meia sighed and replied quickly.

"Telling them the history is a waste of time captain, we should just dump them off the ship and spare us the trouble." Meia commented as she stood next to the Captain.

"Relax Meia, I doubt these three could cause that much trouble to us, there are only three of them after all—normally this would be the part where I say that maybe we should just roast you over an open fire, but that is for a different time—I am more concerned with our other guests."

Magno then directed her gaze at both John-117 and Cortana, who had secretly been having a conversation between themselves and the two faced them, and the elderly woman studied both the Spartan.

"Judging by the way you act around each other, I can say with an absolute certainty that you both are not from either Tarak or Megele—so you two are unknown to me—so then, care to tell us who you two are?"

John and Cortana thought it over and then the AI decided to ask some probing questions first. The two of them had come up with a very radical theory as to why the ships' records had no mention of the UNSC, the UEG, the Covenant, the Flood, or the Halo Rings, but they still needed to be absolutely sure about several key facts that could support what they had used to explain this situation they were in.

"Before we tell you anything, what year is this?"

Buzam looked at the chronometer and answered Cortana's inquiry. "It's March 12, 2818."

"Do you have any records of the Jovian Moons Campaigns, the Battles on Mars ,the terrorist attack on the UN on Io, and the Rain Forest Wars?"

"No, there's no mention of such things in the records."

John then asked the next batch of questions.

"Do you know about the scientists, Shaw and Fujikawa? Their discovery of Slipspace and the development of the Slipspace Drive, and the Odyssey? And the formation of the Inner Colonies and the Outer Colonies?"

Magno shook her head.

"I am afraid not, there has been no mention of either those scientists, or this Slipspace discovery you've mentioned, or this Slipspace engine, and there is no mention of any Colony ship known as the Odyssey on the records we have. I am a member of the First generation, and am therefore privy to the records, but all those events, places, names, and more were never mentioned in the history books and we have had no contact with Earth for nearly a generation or so."

The two looked at each other and sighed, The Spartan then replied solemnly. The data that they had been told had finally proven that

their supposed far fetched theory was actually right on the money, though it was hard to explain, and it would be going against UNSC protocol, they were technically no longer within UNSC jurisdiction since here in this world the UNSC didn't even exist.

"What we're about to tell you might sound rather outlandish  
ma'am you might not even believe us."

"Try me."

John looked at Cortana and she looked back, a silent conversation happened between the Spartan and the newly transformed UNSC AI and it was in the lines of "You first."

"The events we told you about were from our  
dimension."

"Pardon?"

"The reason we said you might not believe us is because we come from a parallel universe, where Earth does exist, and there is actually no difference with our two respective dimensions, but we have a far more radical history. We both belong to the United Earth Government's military, scientific, colonization, and exploratory arm The United Nations Space Command, namely the United Nations Space Command Defense Force."

The people began to listen in as the former AI began to tell them the history of the UNSC.

"In the year of 2160 to 2164, Earth was suffering a massive overpopulation problem as many humans were born and there were not enough resources to go around and the massive gap between the social circles as well, similar to your own dimension, these events and problems were further compounded by a series of brutal wars with two powerful and determined political and ideological entities, the Frieden, a neo fascist movement that was supposedly funded by the United German Republic, and the neo communist faction known as the Koslovics, these factions began the wars by attacking the UN military advisors delegation on the colony on Io, one of the moons near Jupiter. The results were several wars on the surface of Mars, then the forests of South America, and the Jovian Moons."

"After the defeat of the two factions, this turned the UN from a purely diplomatic entity to a full scale military power, thus becoming the United Nations Space Command, with all the armed forces of each country melded to create the UNSC Army, the UNSC Navy, and UNSC Marine Corps. The battles also led to the creation of the United Earth Government to lead humanity in the year 2170. The wars brought all the problems down upon the Earth and the colonies that existed, the Rain Forest wars also added another problem, which was food distribution, the famines and the social problems after the wars created the government that exists in our dimension."

"This led to the need for space exploration and colonization beyond the Earth Solar System which is similar to your dimension's own Colonization Era. The program started in the year 2310 in order to ease the burdens on the already struggling worlds, including Earth, back then, it was not possible to leave the Earth Solar System until

the creation of the Slipspace drive in the 22nd Century. It took at least 52 years for the program to get underway, and this when the first UNSC Colony ship, the Odyssey was launched and so were a vast fleet of colony ships which were all equipped with Slipspace drives. These ships colonized the closest planets and Star systems, creating the Inner Colonies, all of the crews on every ship that formed the Inner Colonies, from citizens to soldiers were methodically selected, thus they are the 'elite' of human society, in both physical and mental attributes."

"By the year of 2490, the UNSC had colonized over 800 hundred worlds, and the colonies ranged from well tamed planetary strong holds to small settlements. Outward Expansion continued and the Inner Colonies became the economic and political hub of the Human Empire, so to speak, but they relied on the raw materials and resources of the Outer Colonies."

"One of the key UNSC fortress worlds was Reach in the Epsilon Eridani sector. The planet was the prime naval yard and training facility. It produced many war ships and served as the key training hub for UNSC covert operatives for the Office of Naval Intelligence or ONI, and special forces divisions."

"The colonization and expansions came with a price however."

"A price—what sort of price?" Magno asked carefully while BC and Meia listened intently along with Hibiki, Bart and Duero.

"There were ideological and political differences that occurred and these led to some Outer Colonies to open rebellion with the UNSC, these events started bush fire wars and hundred more threatening to erupt everywhere. At the year 2517, UNSC analysts predicted the all out and uncontrollable rebellion would happen in twenty years' time. In order to ensure that rebellion and insurrection was defeated without massive civilian losses—the UNSC allowed the start of the Spartan-II Program."

"What's this Spartan-II Program?" Duero asked.

John-117 took over, as he had very intimate knowledge of the Spartan II program for a very good reason—which was he was part of the same program.

"The Spartan-II Super Soldier Program, was named after the legendary Spartan soldiers of the ancient Earth Greek city-state of Sparta. In those days, the people of Sparta were all bred for warfare—male children were meticulously checked for physical weaknesses and defects, those who were found to be at the peak of human physical and mental ability were to be trained in the arts of warfare in the barrack as soon as possible—those who didn't pass the examinations were left in the valleys to die. By the time they were in adulthood—every male Spartan was a full fledged warrior, and even the women who lived there were at the peak of physical and mental ability as well."

"The UNSC then began a massive screening process to select children, both male and female with the needed physical and mental attributes to be part of the project and while 150 were chosen as viable candidates, there were only 75 who were conscripted to the program due to funding restrictions—These children were taken to Reach and

for eight years were trained in the art of war, the use of all UNSC weapons and vehicles, UNSC technology, battle tactics, formations, field strategy, team-work, and moreâ€¦Eight years in their time in Reach, the children were subjected to biological and cybernetic augmentations, and were then subjected to the final augmentations, those augmentations had complications attached to them howeverâ€¦and there were several high risks that many of them would not surviveâ€¦"

"Out of the 75 children who were subjected to the program, only 33 children were able to survive the augmentations without the complications and fully recovered. 10 more survived, but were subjected to the complications and were no longer fit for combat duty and were reassignedâ€¦the rest died."

Magno looked at John-117 and wondered about how he knew so much about this Spartan II Program.

"You seem to know a lot about this program John, why?"

The Spartan looked back and replied.

"I know it wellâ€¦because I am one of the 33 children who survived the augmentations without the complications and fully recovered  
ma'amâ€¦I am a Spartan II Super Soldier of the UNSC."

The women and men gasped at the revelation and looked at him with stunned eyes. The only one who was not frightened was Cortana herself. John still felt guilt about that event, but pushed it aside for now.

"When the others alongside me recovered and began to get used to the augmentations, they had given us quite a number of advantages in both normal conditions and combat."

"We could lift three times our own weight, our reaction time was 20 milliseconds and we could move and react even faster in combat conditions, we could run up to 55 KPH, we had unaided night vision, our bones were virtually indestructible, we could work together to the bordering of telepathy, and we had no physical or psychological problems. And all these results were only after a few months after the augmentations. Nowâ€¦I can do even more than before Ma'am. And those abilities I mentioned are independent of the armor I wear."

"We were meant to be a covert strike force, go in, eliminate insurrection and rebellion before they could spread. However, after our first mission, we were all debriefed for a brand new threatâ€¦one threat that the UNSC was not prepared forâ€¦on Oct 7, 2525."

Cortana took over when the others were confused.

"On Oct 7, 2525, one of the UNSC battle-groups came to the UNSC colony world of Harvest and to the horror of all the crew and officers, they found the planet completely rendered lifeless, every continent, every mountain, every plain, every forest, every grassland, every jungle, every swamp, every river, every lake, and every ocean was completely incinerated and reduced to glass. Nothing alive was detected, not a single animal, plantâ€¦the entire planet was reduced to a massive ball of glass. And nearby was a single alien



ship, the ship then attacked the battle group and wiped out almost the entire battle group except a heavily damaged ship. They were able to get intercepted communications from the ship. It was there the UNSC learned that the foe that attacked and obliterated Harvest and the battle group, was from a caste driven, theological society made of several alien species known as the Covenant and they left one message in perfect English."

"What was the message?" Bart asked.

John spoke the message.

"Your destruction is the will of the Gods, and we are their instrument."

Cortana continued the explanations.

"The first contact began a war between the UNSC and the Covenant that spanned 27 years and it was a losing war. The Covenant were very much holding all the aces, they had numbers, technology, and firepower on their side. Our Fleets, no matter how many we had, were being massacred, for every Covenant ship we were able to take out, we would lose four ships in the process. Only on the ground battles did we have the edge, though we had deadly numbers of losses, the Covenant had even more. But even with a good number of tactical victories, the Covenant still had the edge—by the nearing of the 27th year of fighting, we lost 260 colonies, the entire Outer Colonies were totally obliterated and reduced to glass, and even some of the Inner Colonies were also attacked, the only thing that kept UNSC morale up were the Spartans, who had been fighting the Covenant ever since."

"How many battles have you been in anyway?" The Navi-robot asked the Spartan.

"Over 207 battle engagements."

Hibiki gulped and looked at the UNSC Spartan and blurted out.

"You survived 207 battles?!"

The Spartan shrugged his shoulders, and Cortana then smirked a bit, finding their expressions of shock at that statement to be somewhat—funny, she then decided to add some more details to the story.

"And John has won every UNSC military decoration, the Purple Heart, the Basic Training Honor Graduate Ribbon, Medal of Honor, the Bronze Star, The Colonial Cross, Red Legion of Honor, and the Silver Star, in fact, if I were to recall, the only award you never got was the Prisoner of War Medallion. Not to mention that in the past 27 years of combat with the Covenant, you and the other Spartans got the nick-name Demon from them. You got that from them since you've killed more than 1000 of their forces singlehandedly, and thousands more with the others if I recall."

John shrugged once more, as he was not the one who dwelt too much on awards and ceremonies, but he knew their importance to the morale of the UNSC so he went along with it without question, and he never really made a count on how many of the Covenant he had killed.

"The nick-name doesn't bother me, and I never worry about the body count anyway."

The entire room went silent at the last statement as they realized that they were dealing with no ordinary soldier—the women for that matter made one conclusion on the Spartan—and it was that—this Spartan—this was a man who was NOT the kind to pick a fight with, or to try and intimidate. Any normal person who would try to take this man head on in combat would have to be either extremely brave—or totally insane.

The men were stunned as well, and they wondered how the war between their world and that of the women would have gone if they had soldiers like this Spartan with them.

-----

In another part of the Nirvana—

"Oh dear—nothing matches the charts at all! I just don't get it."

Ezra said as she looked through her special camera as she and the redhead Dread pilot were busy lounging at a terrace in the newly made garden showing the void of stars.

"You don't get it? It's an amazing thing to actually come across and alien, let alone two of them."

"You're right, it is amazing—but we all heard once that the Paeksis was a powerful source of energy. But we had no idea that it could do this to the whole ship and restored it!"

"It made it like brand new Ezra! I wonder if I would be changed if I was abducted..." The young Dread pilot asked to herself loudly with a blissfully curious expression.

Alongside her was Ezra taking a deep relaxing breath, as if trying to calm something down, namely in herself, that naturally got Dita's attention.

"What's the matter Ezra—are you feeling all right?"

"I'm fine Dita—I was just thinking about the others."

Dita then looked back to the stars and replied.

"I think about them too—all the people we had to leave behind at our base back home."

Ezra sighed and thought on the people back there as well.

"I really wish we could go back soon."

She stopped as she spotted Dita cried out and then pointing at the void with a deep look of excitement.

"Dita? What is it?"

"Look at that! There's something coming this way!"

Ezra took a look through her special camera, and saw a trio of dots appear heading for them.

"What could those objects be?"

Dita gave a glazed over, starry look on her face coupled with cat ears as several images came into her mind concerning little green men and floating discs.

"You don't know Ezra? Those are more aliens!"

-----

Back in the room

The silence was deafening until Magno sighed and looked at the still calm Spartan and his companion. To hear about the fact that they had a man of this caliber with them were very discomfoting, and it made her very wary of him. If what they said was true, and what she heard about John-117. She knew from her long experience that this was someone who was very, very capable, and if it was true that he had killed more than a thousand enemy forces, then they had to be careful around him, however she decided to ask him a question.

"John."

"Yes ma'am?"

"If you and I were for the sake of argument, if you and I were enemies, would you kill me even if there were many of my crew in front of you?"

John looked at the women, namely Buzam and Meia who were tense and the security forces behind him were as well, he didn't know why he was being asked such a question and how come the elderly woman asked him that in the first place. He then decided to answer her question.

"Ma'am for the sake of argument if I was you're enemy and I was sent to kill you do you believe you're crew could do anything to stop me, considering what I am capable of?"

The women were noticeably more edgy at that and Meia was ready to use her laser ring. Cortana however spoke at Magno in a very serious tone. The former AI had seen John's records and his battle files, he may not have his weapons right now but his abilities made him more of a weapon, with or without the Mark VI.

"Captain Magno, I have no idea as to why you asked that question, but I will tell you this much if, for the sake of argument, John was going to attack you, he could just move forward before you could back away and with one finger on you're chin, twist you're head and break you're neck before either of the two women beside you could react I know this because I've seen him do it before."

Buzam became even more tense at that statement and Meia was even willing to aim her laser ring at the Spartan.

"We should just dump them in deep space Captainâ€"

Magno looked grimly at the Spartan and then with a sigh and a smile relaxed.

"No need for that Meia. Sorry if my line of questioning seemed odd and unexpected John, I just wanted to know how you would react to that question. Now thenâ€all that you have told me, though I have no doubt there is more to it, puts me in a very unique situation. You seeâ€if you both are from another dimension, then the rules of either my world or that of the men do not apply to the two of you. You two no doubt have no idea as to how you two got here, am I correct?"

The Spartan and the former UNSC AI shook their heads in answer. Magno then replied to that.

"I seeâ€so technically, that would make the two of you refugees on this shipâ€and since you've been fighting for humans, I think you don't see us as enemiesâ€am I correct in that regard John?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Well thenâ€until I decide what to do with the two of you, I guess that you both will have to remain with us until I make a decision, until I do make that decision then you will have to remain as prisoners in word only. That means that you will be given full freedom until I say otherwiseâ€is that all right with you?"

John and Cortana looked at each other and weighed their respective options, they could ask for a shuttle back to Earth, but they were in a new dimension entirely and the UNSC didn't exist at all, and it was doubtful that the Covenant existed because if they did, the human race in this dimension would have had records of them. Considering all this, they would have little choice but to remain with the pirates until the time came for them to have other options available to them once the Captain gave a decision. With that in mind, they decided to agree with the Captain's offer.

"We agree."

"Of course, the both of you will have to pull your own weight while you're on this ship. You may not be prisoners in the full sense but I expect you to contribute something to keep this ship from falling apart, is that understood?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Magno smiled a bit at that and then looked at the three other men from Tarak.

"Now that that's out of the wayâ€the next thing we need to settle is what to do with you three?"

"How come they get special treatment and we don't?!" Hibiki fumed.

Magno sighed and answered him.

"In case you may have forgotten boy, they are from neither you're

world or mine, as such, the rules we have for each other's culture does not apply to them. As such, they don't need to be in prison cells for now."

Buzam then told Magno about what she had learned about Duero, and Magno smiled a bit at that and wondered a bit about the other two, she knew from his clothes that Bart was a First Class citizen, but the younger one, the shorter boy was a Third Class Citizen, and it made her curious as to what he was doing on a ship which only housed selected crew members.

"So the long haired one with the trench-coat is a doctor? So what about the other one, the one dressed up in the Third Class clothes?"

"He's an attacker." Meia answered for her Captain, having recalled seeing Hibiki enter the Vanguard that was there in the reactor room previously.

"Hey! Wait a bloody minute! I'm not a! Owwww!"

Hibiki was about to argue his case when Bart suddenly elbowed him in the chestâ€|stopping him from saying what he wanted to say. He then glared at the First Class Citizen and spoke in a grim and angry tone, while the First Class Citizen smiled smugly.

"Why you!"

Meia then continued with what she was reporting to Magno when she had seen Hibiki.

"I saw him climbing into of the powered armor suits of the men when we were already leaving the area."

"Oh? So this is a combat pilot then."

Before Hibiki could refute the argument however, an incoming message came to Buzam's communicator.

"There's some unknown objects approaching."

The dark skinned woman wasted little time and took out her communicator and spoke through it as to find out just who were their unexpected guests in the middle of nowhere.

"Is it male reinforcements?"

"I'm not sure Commanderâ€|they appear to beâ€|"

"UFOs!" Dita's voice shouted.

-----

Outside of deep space the unknown objects that Dita claimed to be UFOs appeared. They resembled octopus like fighters with four arms/legs, in a segmented body and had one glowing eyes that apparently doubled as a laser cannon. There were several of them and they wasted little to no time attacking the still transforming ship.

-----  
Several massive cracks began to appear on the ship's internal sector, namely in the same room that the others were in. And the roof and walls began to crack as well, dust and rust began to fall in, along with debris and mortar. The Navi-robot panicked and moved about while the announcement came on the speakers that the unknown forces had just attacked the ship without warning or provocation.

-----  
As the attacks grew in intensity, the ship's automated shielding systems did their best to hold off the attacks, but with the ship still transforming itself, the ship had no way to protect itself well from the attacks from the unknown forces

-----  
"Dreads are now moving out!" Meia said as she quickly rushed to the place where her Dread, and that of Jura and Dita were located as well. They had to hurry and hold off the enemy forces until the rest of their fellow Dread pilots could get out and fight back at their new opponents.

"Parfet, can you get us to move?" Buzam asked the head engineer on her communicator.

"It's impossible Commander! I have no control over the Paeksis or the ships at all, and the automated defense systems are barely functioning properly to hold on in defending the ship."

The attacks continued as the pirates did their best to react to the sudden attacks, but with no measure of defense available to them, they were rapidly running out of options.

-----  
"Barnette? Where are you/" Meia asked as she was still running towards the area where their Dreads were, and she hoped that Barnette was still able to get to her Dread and fly with them in order to beat back the attackers.

-----  
"Paiway's locked me in the shower room! I can't get out!"

-----  
"Miss Gascoeur, what about you and the other Dreads?"

-----  
In the Register

Gascogne took the call as the Register was rapidly being consumed by the Paeksis.

"The Dreads can't get out Meia, their launching bay's been completely

consumed by the Paeksis so you're on your own out there, there's nothing I can do and we have to move too since we're being forced out by the crystal as well."

"Roger!"

"Listen Meia, my name is not Gasco, it's Gascogne."

-----

Meia then decided that since her Dread was with Jura and Dita's, they would have to be the ones she would have to contact, she only hoped that bother her comrades were ready and able to respond to her calls and get to their fighters as quickly as possible.

"Jura! What's you're location?"

-----

"I'm heading towards the platform right now, I should be there shortly!"

The blonde pilot ran as best she could and turned to enter the platform, but stopped dead in her tracks in surprise as she looked at the Dreads that they had been piloting, they looked completely different from their normal configurations and seemed to be unlike any Dread design she was familiar with.

"What is going on around here?!"

Dita rushed in as well, and looked on in surprise and awe at the sight of their transformed Dreads, and her one comment pretty much summed it all up.

"Wow!"

-----

As the fighting continued outside of the ship, the sections of the ship that were still exposed were destroyed, and a part of the Megele cruiser was blown off as well.

Inside the platform, Meia and her two fellow pilots did a quick systems check and the leader saw that most of the core systems had not been altered too greatly by the Paeksis when they were seemingly turned by the crystal's effects, their hard points still existed for their missile payloads.

"Looks like the systems haven't been altered too greatly, how about the two of you?"

'I think I can fly it well enough." Jura answered.

"I bet that they must have been powered up! This is so exciting!" Dita said with joy.

"Just remember not to get reckless, let's move out!"

"Roger!"

All three Dreads took off and were fighting with the alien forcesâ€¦well one of them wasn't fighting just yet as a certain redhead tried to talk to the forces that were attacking the ship and now her and her comrades.

-----

A few moments into the fightâ€¦

Meia shot down another of the strange fighters as her Dread seemed to accelerate at a much faster pace than before, much more than the specifications were capable of using.

"The instruments respond differently this time."

Jura then contacted Meia.

"I'm not sure what to make of these units, they certainly aren't men."

Dita then called in with an angry voice and expression.

"Don't you understand it yet, they must be bad and evil aliens!"

"Oh boyâ€¦"

The three Dread pilots however were treated to another shocking sight as a massive white metal covered ship that resembled a seed, the front of it seemed to have a maw of some sort and then the maw opened and out came two cubes of metal that suddenly glowed and expandedâ€¦revealing more of the same fighters that were currently attacking the ship.

Meia was very much surprised, maybe Dita was right, these must be aliens of some sort as she had never seen that kind of unit delivery system before.

-----

In another part of the shipâ€¦

"I was really stupid coming here! Maybe I should have just stayed back on Tarak and be content with being just a Third Class Citizen!"

Hibiki said as he sat on the floor of another cell. He had been taken there under the protective eye of the Spartan. Bart had managed to make a deal with Magno for himself and his fellow men.

The cowardly cadet had managed to convince the captain, despite the warnings of the Navi-robot that he was a helmsman, while Duero, with him being a doctor was slated to take care of their wounded and injured. The Captain agreed, but reminded the cadet that they were not friends, the reason she agreed with it was for the survival of the crew, nothing more.

Cortana however asked to be taken to the bridge, citing that she was more useful there than anywhere else at this point. John agreed to take Hibiki to the hanger bay where his Vanguard was, despite his



protests that he was not a pilot of the Vanguards. The boy struggled hard, but the Spartan held him in a firm but gentle grip as the Spartan can manage. Buzam wanted to make sure that Hibiki would actually fight, but she decided to let the UNSC Spartan do the convincing.

"Really? So why are you here?"

Hibiki moaned sadly and replied.

"It was because of a stupid bet I made with my big mouth, I bet that I could steal on the Vanguards that was marked by the others to prove that I could, I wanted to back out, but they wouldn't stop so before I could think about it more I bet I would not only steal the whole Vanguard with the marked part but bring it back to Tarak! I wanted to see if there was more to life than just doing something day in a day out and not being able to see just what else was out there in the world I should just been silent instead of being so hot headed and stay a Third Class Citizen I don't know what to do."

John-117 however saw things differently, he saw that all the boy needed was a push in the right direction, and despite the fact that he was not qualified to be this young man's commanding officer, he had to do something to inspire him to do the right thing. Hibiki was on a cross-road and if he was not told to do what he felt was right, he was going to be stuck there forever, and he did have some measure of promise, in the eyes of the battle hardened Master Chief Petty Officer.

He thought about what he could say to the young man and then remembered a very important lesson he learned back on Reach when he was still young and not yet a full Spartan. And in truth it seemed appropriate for the situation he found himself in with Hibiki.

"Hibiki let me tell you a little something about myself."

"Huh?"

"Listen when I was on Reach years before I was not a good team player or leader, I wanted to do everything myself and I despised working with others. One day I was paired with two other Spartan trainees Sam-034, and Kelly-084. We were supposed to move through a network of ropes, beams, bars, and bridges to reach the top of the mountain like play-ground to ring a bell on the top. The rules in that exercise were that the first team to ring the bell gets to have a lavish meal, and the last team to ring the bell had no dinner that night."

"I didn't want to work with either Sam and Kelly and said that I could ring the bell myself, and I did, I left them behind and rang the bell first, Sam and Kelly soon followed. My trainer Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez was not happy with what I did and told me that my team lost, along with me and we were not going to eat dinner that night."

"Why did he do that to you?!"

"He explained his decision in these words. 'You're team loses, you

lose. You don't win until you're team wins.' That night neither me, Kelly, nor Sam had dinner while the others had their meals. I realized how my words got me and my two fellow trainees in a serious mess, as my growling stomach that day can attest to. I learned a valuable lesson that day and the next time we had that same exerciseâ€¦I made sure that Kelly and Sam were there when we reached the top and rang the bell as the first team on the top. I learned team work that day and I made two friends that I worked with for a long timeâ€¦"

John then took Hibiki to the area where his Vanguard was and as the young man was looking at the newly transformed Vanguard with awe, and the Spartan then decided to finish saying what he wanted to say.

"We sometimes say things we can't take back once we say them, and we then regret the decisions we make because of what we said. But we have to be responsible for the choices we made thenâ€¦and the choices we make now. You have a choice nowâ€¦to either stay here and hide, and prove those men back on Tarak right and give up on what you want because of being afraidâ€¦ or you can fight and prove to them and yourself that you are a man of not just you're word but you are willing to fight for what you feel is worth it, you are not on Tarak anymore Hibiki, you are here and nowâ€¦and it is up to you, to cower, or to fight. I won't make you choose eitherâ€¦it's all up to you now."

With that, he then made his way into the bridge, leaving Hibiki to reflect on his words.

It didn't take long for Hibiki to reach a decision as he weighed his options and took the Spartan's speech to mind.

-----

In the bridgeâ€¦

"Hmmâ€¦not the same as the bridge back on the Pillar of Autumn or the Cairo station, but comfortable enough."

Cortana commented as she was now in the new bridge of the combined ships, she along with Bart were now in the bridge as Belvedere Amarone, and Celtic took their current positions on the command areas along with Ezra. The battle was very much in full swing and explosions were everywhere. Bart was being led to the front part of the bridge as there were two massive pools of light in wells thereâ€¦one was in deep purple for some reason, while the other was deep emerald green, and the pool of purple seemed to reject Bart when he was brought close to it. So they wondered just what this was going to doâ€¦however, as Cortana came close to it, the pool glowed softly and it seemed not to reject Cortana.

The former UNSC AI felt something tugging on her mind and it certainly didn't feel the least bit threatening. She stepped on the pool of water and stood there for a minute and then the pool swallowed the woman and a massive lid sealed over the pool, the others were shocked and Bart became even more frightened. However the surprise didn't last very long as a crystal seemed to appear on top of the lid and out came Cortanaâ€¦but she was different, instead of being a human being clothes, she was now back to her AI form and was now human sized as well. The woman turned to admire herself a bit

more and smirked.

"Wellâ€¦|At least I'm human sized this time."

"Cortana? Is that youâ€¦|and are you all right?!" Buzam asked.

Cortana smiled and replied.

"I'm fine Buzamâ€¦|just getting used to being a human sized AI this time, back then, I wasn't exactly human sized to start with and I wasâ€¦|"

"Slow downâ€¦|what did you say? You used to BE and AI?!"

Cortana then replied to the shocked look of everyone in the bridge at her announcement..

"I'm not really sure what happened, but the Paeksis may have something to do with it and now isn't really the right time for the discussion, don't you think?"

The others then turned to the sound of an opening door and in walked the Master Chief without Hibiki, the women then looked at him with concern, but the Spartan was more concerned with Cortana as he was surprised at the sudden changes she had undergone. He walked over to her and studied her now human sized AI form and Cortana decided to tease him a bit.

"Keep that up John and I'd say you're becoming a pervert."

"Sorry, just didn't expect you be back in you're old AI form all of a sudden, where are you?"

"Judging from where my, well, my human body is, I'd say I'm in some sort of holo-tank, and it must allow me to retake my old AI form through the display crystal on top, though as you can seem, I'm human sized this time. And it seems I can still do my old functions, with a lot more power this time."

"Good."

Magno and Buzam then decided to ask the Master Chief as to where the young kid he was escorting earlier was. The elderly captain was the very first to ask the Spartan.

"Where's the short one?"

"I left him in the Hanger with that Vanguard he was trying to steal before the whole mess started."

Buzam was a bit concerned by this as she had thought that maybe the young man would take the Vanguard and flee the scene, and that would lessen their chances to win the desperate fight that they were in right nowâ€¦|if they didn't get the ship out of the area, then they would be in serious trouble.

"You let him go? What if he decides to escape in that Vanguard?"

John-117 looked at Buzam and Magno and replied.

"He won't."

"How can you be so sure?"

Cortana then touched her forehead and smiled a bit.

"We've got an incoming message from the Hanger Bay areaâ€¦seems like a young kid wants to speak to us here on the bridge."

The bridge crew turned and there appeared Hibiki, the boy looked very determined and spirited, unlike before when he was looking rather dejected and sullen when he was taken to the Hanger by the Spartan.

"I want to fight!"

"Really now?"

Magno asked, a bit surprised at the sudden changes in Hibiki's actions and voice.

"Yes! I may be here on the Ikazuchi for the wrong reasons, I may not be a First Class Citizen, I may not be a trained Vanguard pilot, and I'm no soldierâ€¦But I am not going to stay here and do nothing and let my chance to see where my decisions take me be taken away by anyone. I'm no skilled pilot, but I don't care! I will fight!"

Buzam couldn't help but smile a bit at the show of courage the boy had and decided to release the manacles on the boy's wrists, as soon as the manacles were removed, she looked at the young man as he flexed his wrists and she then saw the Spartan walk over and speak to Hibiki.

"Are you ready for that?"

Hibiki looked at the Spartan and did something that no one expected, with the exception of the Spartan. The young boy nodded and gave a salute and spoke in a very strong tone.

"Yes I am, Master Chief!"

Hibiki apparently decided to address the Spartan with his rank, and incidentally, one of his nick names among the UNSC Marine Corps, Navy, and Special Forces teams.

John gave a slight nod and saluted Hibiki back.

"Then good luck, and don't get careless."

"Yes sir!"

Cortana laughed a bit and looked at the Spartan with a bit of a smirk on her face as the communication lines were put off. The restored AI then commented at what she had just witnessed

"Wowâ€¦who knew that you could actually turn that kid around and make him want to fight?"

The Spartan shrugged his shoulders. And that was when Cortana picked some incoming signals.

"I'm picking up more faint contacts, moving in fast, they don't seem to be the same as those units that the Dreads are fighting, they seem to be moving very fast towards us. They will be on top of us in five minutes."

"More fighters?"

John asked Cortana as he looked at the display screen and there indeed were three more contacts that were not closing in towards the still transforming ship. They were moving rather fast and were far away from the battle, showing that they were being sent to attack the ship in a far more direct and precise manner. And they were moving in very quickly.

"I don't think soâ€¦wait, they're closer now. They appear to be smaller craft, and are not the same as the fighters, judging from the profiles they have and their designâ€¦they must be transport units and that means only one thing."

"Boarding craft." The Spartan finished.

-----

The new contacts were fastâ€¦very fast and resembled small sea cucumbers as they were shaped like them and it seemed that they were concerned only to attach on the ship and deliver their deadly cargo of attack units. Inside the bowels of the ships, which hideously enough, resembled bio-mechanical walls of one's stomach, large figures seemed to be held by cables and appeared to be resting. However, as they closed the gap towards the still unmoving ship, the cables were detached from the bodies and they began to move, and three eyes began to glow, along with what appeared to be weapons, as if they were now waiting for the right time to strike once the craft had latched on the ship.

Out in spaceâ€¦

The Dreads were now getting some back-up in the shape of a gold and white Vanguard. After making a slight mishap, Hibiki managed to get the hang of using his Vanguard's weapons, which included a long sword made of solid green energy and another smaller one. After he took out several fighters with the weapon and got used to fighting at close combat, he tried to charge, but several more Cube Fighters came on the scene and blocked him and the Dreads. Several of the alien fighters then broke off and then covered the boarding craftâ€¦firing at the ship and acting as sacrificial meat shields to block the attacks made by the Dreads, who were forced to break away and deal with the main vessel.

-----

The bridgeâ€¦

"Contact Meia and the others, see if they can intercept the boarding craft!"

Buzam ordered as Bart was pushed towards the next well. The cowardly

cadet moved reluctantly and that allowed the incoming craft, at least three in number to get closer to the ship.

"Roger!"

Belvedere, Amarone, Ezra, and Celtic tried then to contact the Dread pilots, while Cortana tracked the incoming units. The AI shook her head just as Bart was now inside the forward well of energy as Cortana had made some estimations and calculations as to where the boarding craft were going to hit..

"The Dreads are not going to make it in timeâ€¦by the time they can break through, those boarding craft will have already deployed their units on the ship and the units they might have with them will have already entered the ship and do severe damage to the ship."

Ezra then gave the report to both Buzam and Magno.

"I'm sorry Captain, Commander, but Dita, Meia, Jura, and that young one Hibiki can't assist us right now, they still can't seem to get past those unknown fighters and they are only able to keep them from attacking us."

The two officers looked worried, until John-117 decided to take care that matter personally, he then turned to Cortana after looking at how fast the boarding craft were coming in.

"How long will it be before they attach to the ship?"

"At least 2 and a half minutes at their current speed."

"Can you determine their most likely target?"

"Maybe the Paeksis coreâ€¦if they can shut down the engines, the ship will be completely helpless and so will we."

"Can you determine their exact landing area and if there are any other people on the section?"

"They are aiming for the side of the Megele ship that's still intact, that would give them a fairly close run to the engine sector. And there seems to be no one else in the section Johnâ€¦what do you have in mind?"

"Have the area sealed off from the rest of the ship, use the blast doors if you can, I'll be there to take care of themâ€¦I'll make sure that they don't get any further into the ship and harm both the engines and the crew."

"All rightâ€¦but come back alive, you hear me?"

"I will."

The Spartan then directed his attention to both the officers who looked at him with shock on their faces. He shrugged and replied.

"Don't worry, have you're security teams there as well to support me once you get them ready. Make sure to have them fully outfitted with heavy weapons and body armor before you do however, and then have

Cortana open the blast doors. But I will need my weapons back."

Seeing as they have no other options at this point, the two officers agreed to allow him to get his weapons. Buzam then guided the Spartan to a nearby room near the bridge, and there were his weapons, the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, his Combat Knife, the grenades, and his M7 Caseless Submachine Guns, he then placed them in their needed areas, with the exception of his Assault Rifle. With that done, he took off and moved at high speed to intercept the incoming boarders as Cortana showed him a timer on his HUDS to tell them when the boarding craft were going to connect.

It was not surprising that several of the crew who were nearby were stunned to see the Spartan move past them at a speed which was indeed super human, and it was proof that he was indeed a Super Soldier as he moved through the corridors as Cortana provided him a NAV marker to the section where the boarding craft were going to be in.

Apparently, Cortana's now enhanced AI form could guide, communicate, and aid John-117 even if she was no longer in the Mjolnir Mark VI. John-117 then noted that his Mark VI had undergone some radical changes as he made his way to the section.

-----

The Dreads and the Vanguard were able to even up the odds, but they were now too late as the boarding craft latched on the section of the ship. However, it was at that same moment that the once motionless ship came online and ran away from the battle.

"Well, what do you know the ship's moving!" Magno commented as Bart moved the ship away from battle, this was where his cowardice actually became an asset.

But the sudden movement and direction of the ship was not enough to force the now attached boarding craft off the ship as they stuck there like leeches as the front of their hulls opened up like sucker mouths and held fast to the ship even when it was moving away from the battle. The sparks that were seen in the area proved that the units inside the cucumber-like boarding craft were already making their way through the hull of the still fleeing ship.

The Dreads and Vanguard were forced to follow the ship while the unknown forces continued their attacks on both the ship's defenders, and the ship itself.

-----

In the section of the ship

"They are nearly through John, and they are breaching the hull. I can fix the gravity in the room to protect the atmosphere once the area is depressurized, but you'll have to be careful as that it will take a few moments."

"Got it Cortana have they broken through?"

"Not yet John, you're already in the section so they will be in there

soon enough."

The Spartan nodded as he rounded the next hallway and looked to find himself in a massive room filled with pillars of Paeksis crystal and piles of debris, good enough cover for him as he looked at the now glowing hull areas far away that told him that the boarders were now making their way into the ship. He made sure to run a quick check on his shield gauge and medical systems, along with his ammunition reserves. All were in good working order, and his shields seem to be a lot stronger than before—making him wonder if the Paeksis had done something to his Mark VI Armor, it certainly moved and acted differently and seemed to be upgraded, he however pushed those thoughts aside as he heard Cortana's voice in his COM system.

"They're just about through John, get ready!"

The hulls finally were melted off and in stepped the first of the boarders, apparently the thing had not spotted the Spartan just yet, allowing John-117 to study this new threat, his helmet cameras already recording the new attacker.

It seemed to resemble the Sangheili that he fought with before in the early years of the 27 years war with the Covenant, namely in terms of height, but it was not the same as well. It appeared to have three eyes and no mouth, as the majority of its face, except the eyes, was covered in pseudo-organic metal, that seemed to be deep black in color, the metal alloy seemed to cover the not on the face, but the upper chest region, small ridge-like plates on the abdomen and the fore-arms, along with the sides of the hips and the lower legs. The rest appeared to have exposed flesh which was in a dull brown color. The strange thing was that his scanners registered no life signs on the first of the units, and the unit seemed to be totally automated, meaning that the flesh was only for show, this meant he must be dealing with some sort of biomechanical unit. On the right arm appeared to be some sort of Directed Energy Weapon and it seemed to have been grafted directly onto the arm. The machine was a vaguely humanoid shape and had several large metallic spines on its back, but they appear to be used for intimidation and there appeared to be a blade attached to the left arm, no doubt for close combat situations.

Whoever these guys are, they were certainly made for combat, but he had a feeling that these were merely sent to destroy whatever was in their current path and their objectives. The feeling of weightlessness began to affect him, but he quickly used the magnetic pads on his boots to hold himself in place, the effects didn't seem to bother the first unit as it then moved out of the way and the rest followed, all of them appearing the same type as the very first, he then did a quick head count and determined at least three dozen at best. As soon as the gravity came back, he deactivated his magnetic pads and took careful aim—

And fired—

The units turned and one of them got hit by the 7.62mm x 51 FMJ rounds that came from the weapon, the bullets tore into the armor plating and the exposed fleshy sections. The armor buckled and showed signs of damage and fell to the barrage, while the flesh was torn off and the biomechanical units released a stream of dark magenta fluid. The one that was hit recoiled and managed to get back up from the



initial impacts, but got a face full of the rounds and those tore through the head and throat. The unit had not been able to fire and was about to use it's main ranged weapon when the second burst of rounds hit the head, blowing off half the face of the unit splattering magenta fluid/blood, flesh and face armor over the others as the unit fell to the ground.

The other boarders in the first group directed their attentions to the Spartan as he fired another volley of the rounds and injured several others and spent the clip, the others merely waited for their own turn to attack the Spartan. Seemingly confident that they could handle this new intruder on their operations, the Spartan quickly released the spent clip and got out another clip and loaded it as the units then began to open fire. Just as Cortana sealed the blast doors, making sure that neither him nor the boarders were going any further in the ship. The units then fired deep red beams of plasma that slammed into the wall section the Spartan hid behind on. The bolts sizzled the metal and the smell of ozone and hot metal filled the air as the Spartan cocked the Assault Rifle and fired another barrage at the enemy units, while the plasma bolts either hit the walls, hit the walls behind him, or slammed into his shields. The shields flared from the impacts of the plasma bolts and the Spartan saw the shield gauge lose a small portion of the energy reserve in it, but he was not yet in danger as he quickly rolled to the side to a crystal covered crate and quickly got into a kneeling firing position and unleashed another volley of bullets into the first group.

One boarding unit got several bullets in the leg and faltered, allowing the Spartan to fire another spray of bullets into another unit, spilling more of the magenta fluid and coating the walls and floor, and that was when he fired another barrage and hit both units right in the face, the second unit that got hit in the chest had several bullets rip into the face and the kneeling unit got hit with another barrage right in top of the head, ripping the head of the unit off in a hail of bullet rounds. The other units fired more plasma bolts at the Spartan, and John quickly moved to the wall and took out one of his grenades and tossed the weapon into the group. The units seemed not to notice the explosive weapon and the weapon detonated. The explosion decimated the group and blew off several of the units to pieces, their severed body parts, both internal and external flying off everywhere, along with spatters of their fluids, while others were too badly damage and ceased functioning and those units were now only bleeding out their fluids all over the floor.

Some of the first group that were enveloped in the explosion were bare of sections of their organic coverings and were bleeding profusely, some had even portions of the decimated fleshy coverings falling off, creating pools of the magenta fluid. The Spartan quickly charged in with his Assault Rifle and fired another barrage at full power at running speed, the majority of the concentrated attack ripping through the chest of one of the intact units, and it fell down, it's main power cell underneath the armor completely shredded, the Spartan then fired short bursts from the Assault Rifle's remaining clip into several of the badly damaged units, either in the head or the exposed and mangled yet intact chest area, taking the units out quickly and efficiently.

He then moved out of the way and dropped his Assault Rifle as one of

the units attacked with it's blade, the Spartan moved rapidly out of the way and launched a punch right at the face of the attacker, the blow was amplified by the Mark VI and even further, much to the Spartan's surprise as his punch crushed through the face of the attacking unit, covering his arm with the fluid as the unit fell to the ground with it's head crushed into pulp by the Spartan's punch. John grabbed his Assault rifle and then took out one of his M7 SMGs and fired a barrage of rounds into another boarder unit as he ducked from the unit's plasma attack. The caseless rounds shredded the torso section and the Spartan wasted no time to quickly place the Assault Rifle on his back and take out the other M7 SMG and used the other to unleash another withering barrage into another trio of the boarding units, the bullets may not be very accurate, but since each M7 SMG had at least 60 rounds of it's 5x23mm Caseless FMJ ammunition, the very area was filled with bullets and those ripped into the trio that tried to attack and the damage was considerable as they were close together. The Spartan then watched as his apparently reinforced shields took another barrage of plasma bolts and took far more damage than it normally could handle, he then moved away as he was bathed in massive amounts of shimmering and flowing golden energy, he took cover behind a nearby pillar of crystal and he rapidly reloaded his M7 SMGs and then did the same with his Assault Rifle and he finished off the last of the first dozen with a blast of Assault Rifle rounds right in the face.

The Spartan checked his ammunition reserves and they were still good as his shields began to quickly recharge. He then turned his attention to the remaining two groups as they fired their own weapons, the groups were in even spacing but seemed to move like a single wall of units just like an old Earth style battalion. There seemed to be no form of advanced military tactics and formations with them. The Spartan realized that whoever sent these units into the ship must not care very much about tactics, strategy, and infantry formations. The creators seemed to believe that only through overwhelming numbers could they win this fight. The veteran warrior knew that while such tactics were flawed in situations like this, they were deathly effective when the enemy had massive reinforcements to commit to the attack.

He then realized what that meant and he quickly contacted Cortana as he checked his weapons and began to study the next wave coming at him.

"Cortana! Are there other boarding craft units coming?"

"Hold on John I'm scanning right now that's a negative John, there's only those three and those units in them."

"Got it what's the situation outside? And where are the security teams?"

"The Dreads and that Vanguard are doing what they can and they are keeping that thing focused on them alone, but the security teams will take a while to assemble apparently they were not expecting themselves to be boarded."

John grunted and moved away from the glass and fired another barrage from his freshly loaded Assault rifle and then charged at the first three that came at him as the bullets he fired ripped into their ranks, the others from the second unit apparently were not heeding

the other in front of them and bombarded their own comrades, and the ones being subjected to friendly fire didn't seem to notice, their only concern was to take out the Spartan and the Master Chief used that to his advantage as his shields continued to hold, several more units were forced back as they were cut down by the hail of bullet fire.

The lights then went out in the section they were in, and the emergency lights bathed the area in a faint blue light, but he knew that those enemies of his must have vision modesâ€|and in factâ€|so did he, as he was given unaided full night vision by the augmentations so he could see them well enough even in the barely illuminated darkness. As the place was lit up by plasma bolts from his foes and flashes from his guns.

Two units were peppered by the FMJ rounds and several sections of their lower torso were blown off by the attacks, the Spartan then placed aside his Assault rifle and took his also loaded M7 SMGs and fired at them, further cutting his foes apart as he moved faster before they could, far beyond even his natural reflexesâ€|apparently the Paeksis had not just boosted the strength and integrity of the shields and their recharge time, but apparently had boosted the power offered by the reactive metal liquid crystal in the Mjolnir, explaining the massive increase in his reaction time and speed. And it seemed that his own body had been affected to boost the overall performance of his naturally existing traits and his augmentations, no doubt in order to match up with the massive upgrades to the Mjolnir Mark VI.

Despite these changes, the Spartan knew better than to push his luck in dangerous efforts that won't workâ€| and placed the Assault rifle aside on his back and spotted a small metal rod and grabbed it and tossed it forward like a javelin at another of the boarders, the weapon had only a semi sharp tip, but in the hands of a Spartan, it became a powerful missile of death and passed clear through the body of one of the boarder unitsâ€|destroying the 'heart' and causing it to bleed out profusely from both the front and back. The missile then skewered two more of the boarder units in the chest, placing them together and the results were both of them shutting down as the same time and bleeding profusely all over the deck and covering the crystal floor.

The Spartan then took out his SMGs, and rushed in towards the ones who were still trying to get a bead on himâ€|several units got their bodies riddled with bullets from the two SMGs and the Spartan then moved towards a large pile of crystals and used them to cover him as he recharged his shields and when they were fully charged, he then aimed the weapons to the roof as he spotted an unstable section of the roof covered in crystals. The bullets slammed into the weak supports and the boarders were crushed as the roof fell on themâ€|crushing them flat and spraying more of their magenta colored fluids all over the place.

The sight on the section he was in was ghastly as pools and streams of the magenta fluids were everywhere and there were massive amounts of the fluid sprayed all over the walls in very morbid patterns, and there were bodies of the boarders everywhere, and body parts as well, from the grenade explosion.

The Spartan didn't consider the utter carnage he was waging on the

enemy and quickly moved in with both SMGs ready and fired at the survivors. One such unit had it's right arm ripped off at the middle of the upper arm by the concerted assault. It then attacked with it's blade which the Spartan ducked and he placed one of the SMGs aside and took out his Combat Knife and jammed the weapon at the neck of the creature between the armor plating it had at the time and pierced the neck and with one powerful swipe decapitated the attacker, the Spartan turned and threw the knife right into the eye of another unit that attacked him with it's plasma weapon, the enhanced energy shields on his Mark VI blocking the attacks and allowing the Spartan to turn and fire another barrage of bullets at the remaining targets with the SMG in his left hand fully extended and he moved to the crystal behind him and used it as cover as the plasma bolts flew over his head.

He then noted that the armor of the units appeared to be somewhat like passive energy shielding, similar in the sense of massive coats of high grade titanium ship plating used to block the massive amounts of plasma torpedoes on certain classes of UNSC ships, as the plasma bolts that slammed into their backs from their comrades' weapons seemed to dissipate over time with lower damage. This meant that the units' integrated body armor must be energy resistant, in a way like a solid non-energy version of his Mark VI's shields, and that of the Elites but apparently they were not able to handle solid projectile weapons well, like his Assault Rifle and his SMGs, meaning that his weapons were more than adequate to deal with them quickly and effectively.

As he fired another barrage from his fully extended SMG, he then took out his last grenade and tossed it into their ranks and the explosion had another messy effect as the explosive weapon tore through the ranks of the enemy and splattered them all over the place.

However, it seemed that some of the units got wiser and began to hide themselves from the eyes of the Spartan and use cover as he did, though not as effectively as he could still see them. He took out another unit as it tried to hide and moved out, placing back the SMG to it's compact form and took back his knife from the still dead body of the unit he had thrown the knife at. With the weapon back, he moved towards another crystal pillar and spotted another enemy moving and firing at him, he took his Assault Rifle and loaded a fresh magazine in, and when he had a clear shot, unleashed a hail of bullets at the attacker, shredding off a large portion of the torso and sent the foe down from the impact, it got up, only to have more of the Assault Rifle rounds rip into the face and the amount ripped the head clean off sending out more splatter all over the place and letting the body drop dead. The Spartan did a quick head count and found out that there were only a small group that was left and from the looks of things, they were not going to last very long with that in mind, he decided to mop things up and wait for the crew to get into position, he then hoped that Hibiki and the others fighting the enemy outside had better luck right now.

As the last units of the unknown alien hostiles' boarding group managed to hold the Spartan off, he then began to move from area to area, firing rapid suppressing fire from his Assault rifle and moved behind cover to load his weapon and took out his SMGs to even up the odds filling up the areas with bullet holes and more splatters of blood and broken crystals as the fighting in the section that was sealed off by order of John-117 began to die

down.

-----  
Outsideâ€|

Hibiki managed to finally strike down the last pair of alien fighters that were before him and he then decided to take out the main unit by himself, hoping to finally prove that he had what it took be stronger and better than he was now. With that in mind, he launched his Vanguard straight at the mother ship. The Tarak male and the other Megele pilots had been able to hold their own, but they were still trying to find a way to end the threat of the aliens, and it seemed that Hibiki decided to take things into his own hands.

"Dita! What are you doing?!"

Meia cried out as the bubbly redhead suddenly directed her Dread to follow Hibiki's reckless charge to finish of the enemy by himself, and the redhead decided to follow him in the attack.

"Don't worry Leader! Mr. Alien here can do it! I know he can!"

"Come on!"

Hibiki led his Vanguard closer and slashed down a few more of the fighters that tried to stop him and it seemed that his sudden and unexpected charge had an effect on the enemy's main ship as it halted it's attempts to release more of the fighters to engage the Dreads and the Vanguard and seemed to be rallying the surviving fighters to it's side to try and halt the Vanguard's charge towards it.

Several of the alien fighters finally managed to stop the Vanguard, just as Dita's Dread came in close and then the Seed like ship fired out a mass of tendrils towards the restrained Vanguard. The tendrils slammed into the pile as the Dread arrived and a massive explosion engulfed the entire area.

"DITA!!!" Meia cried out in shock and horror as the explosion consumed the Dread.

"Thatâ€|idiot!!" Jura said with a sound of sadness as she turned her eyes away from the explosion.

In the ship's bridgeâ€|

Magno sighed at the explosion and looked down, she was starting to like the young loudmouth Tarak youth as he held his own despite not being a professional pilot, Buzam also looked saddened somewhat as she would then have to tell the Spartan of the boy's death.

"I guess the miracle we hoped for t\didn't arrive after all."

Buzam nodded at the comment and reached for her communicator.

"I'll have the crew begin evacuation proceduresâ€|we might to abandonâ€|"

"Don't count that kid out just yet Buzamâ€|this fight is far from over." Cortana said with a smirk as she was picking up movement and a

power-source coming out from the explosion.

The women and the Navi-robot looked on as a massive hand appeared and crushed the tendrils before it, along with wiping off the burning wreckage of the fighters that tried to stop it, and then a massive figure appeared in the light and heat of the explosion. It was massiveâ€|

The machine appeared to be of humanoid form, but was armored head to toe and shaped like a powerful armored warrior with two massive cannons on it's back and those appeared to have massive energy focusing crystals on it as well. The machine lost the fiery red color and was decked in deep navy blue armor and had green energy flowing out from several areas along with sections of green crystalsâ€|there were also blades on the fore-arms as well.

"What is that?!" Both meia and Jura said at the very same time as they looked at the massive machine that appeared from the explosion.

"Wellâ€|that's interestingâ€|" Cortana commented as she looked on, somewhat impressed by the sight.

"What is that?! Some new weapon of the men?!" Magno said in surprise.

"Is this a real miracle?!' Buzam said as well.

The massive robot then charged right for the main ship as several smaller fighters were released to try and stop the new unit from attacking the main ship, but they were pushed away like gnats as the robot went on with the attack, the ship tried to close itself up but the robot merely jammed it's arms forward and began to rip the closed maw back open and then the cannons on the back slid over to the shoulders and they powered up and fired a massive energy beam right into the exposed maw of the ship. The beams ripped through the ship and the ship was consumed in a fiery nova.

"Wellâ€|it looks like we're not going to have to abandon ship

Inside the massive mecha's cockpitâ€|Hibiki opened his eyes slowly and felt good about himself, he had done something and wonâ€|but his relief was replaced with shock and disbelief as he found his hands on a pair of other hands and he then noted that he was not alone in the machine as a certain redhead was on his lap and she leaned back into his chest and sighed happily.

"What's going on here?!"

"Hmmâ€|I just knew Mr. Alien was going to save us!"

Hibiki felt shock in him as he wondered if this was the limit of what he could do on his own.

As they all returned to the ship, the crew then tried to contact the Spartan, but when no response came, they decided to go and see what was happening as the security teams were now ready to move in and support the Spartan.

-----

(Okayâ€|on the topic of pairings with the Master Chiefâ€|well, that is up to me, but Cortana is pretty much having more leeway than the other soon to come candidates as she knows him a lot more than the others, having worked with him for many years, so expect things to get more interesting as the story develops as there are just as many viable candidates to hook up with the Spartan.)

(On the subject ofâ€|wellâ€|John-117's reactions to the female speciesâ€|the Catalytic Thyroid Implant may suppress sexual driveâ€|but that does not mean that it's gone permanently now does it? It's just suppressed and could come back, though not very intensely. So yesâ€|John-117 in this story is attracted to the fairer sex, like any normal human being, despite the augmentations and his lifestyle as a Spartan. Happy now?)

( ) Yesâ€|that's Cortana in her human form, and she is following the same body design as she had in her AI form in Halo 3 and in human flesh and blood. As she is human now, she can do things and feel things that all human beings can do, which can be rather new to her as she had been an AI before all this happened. Though she however has some abilities that are exclusively her own and no other human can match.

Just so you knowâ€|this IS her first time being human so the things we do and the feelings and m\emotions we feel as part of everyday life are completely new to her, so in respect, this would mean that in human terms, she's a child in an adult body at this point.

( ) Imagine the same outfit Barnette wore in the Second Stage when she filled in for Gascogne.

-----

In front of the blast doorsâ€|

Several groups of the Megele pirates' security teams were now carrying their standard issue laser rifles and laser rings as well, and were even wearing their space suits as they got ready to enter the area. Next to them were Buzam, Cortana, Gascogne, Magno, Barnette, Duero, Hibiki, Meia, Jura, and Parfet, along with her engineers. They had not heard anything from behind the blast doors and wondered what had happened with the Spartan.

Barnette snorted as she readied her Calico submachine gun, an antique fire-arm that she had in her gun collection. Among the women, Barnette was somewhat odd as among the women who used advanced weapons, she still favored solid projectile firing weapons over them. She had not been in the room to hear about the Spartan's history so she assumed that the worst has happened to the UNSC Super Soldier.

"That man must not be still around, no doubt he's gone."

Meia however had her doubts, she has seen how fast the Spartan could move, and after hearing his combat history and records, she doubted that he would be easily dispatched.

Jura remained silent as she merely decided to see just what that lone warrior could accomplish by himself against an alien force as she was

also not present when the Spartan had revealed his origins and history.

Hibiki however was there in the room and he reacted to Barnette's bard at the Spartan.

"That man's survived 207 battles in 27 years of his life and won every military award! Not to mention he's already killed over 1000 enemy troops by HIMSELF! He's not going to be beaten easily!!!"

"Yeahâ€|sure he did, who would believe anything a man says anyway?" Barnette retaliated.

Several of the security personnel thought the same thing, thinking that the man was lying, though there were some of the women security members who were there in the room, so to them, this was the time to see if the man in green and black armor could prove his words.

"Quietâ€|Parfet, have you managed to get power back on the section so we can open the doors?"

The head engineer was working with her lap-top and had tit connected to a nearby port. The connections to the section that the Spartan had gone to had been cut in the fighting, so power to the place had been cut. Thus a manual approach had to be taken by the crew open up the place.

"Hold onâ€|there! Lights should be up once we enter the section!"

The doors opened and the women stepped in as the lights came back onâ€|to reveal the carnage of the room. There were splatters of dark magenta colored fluid everywhere on the walls along with bullet holes as well, there were also burned sections of the walls by energy weapons. The ground had pools and streams of the fluids everywhere and then they saw the bodies of the invaders, some were badly ripped apart by bullets and others had their parts blown off as well and those were littering the areaâ€|along with chunks of the pseudo-flesh as well. They even saw the ones that were brutally blown up by the grenades and the ones that were crushed to a pulp by the falling roof.

The sight of the carnage stunned and shocked the women, only Magno, Buzam, Cortana, and Gascogne managed to keep it together, the others were not so lucky however as they looked at the mess seeing bodies ripped apart and even saw the one unit that had it's head crushed by John's fist.

Naturally more than a good number of the women made their discomfort known.

"By Grand Maâ€|"

"Oh! I'm gonna be sick!!!"

"This isâ€|disgusting!!!"

"Ohâ€|I don't feel so goodâ€|"



"One man did all THISâ€|?!"

Barnette was stunned and felt VERY queasy and cold at the sight of the massacre and tightened her grip on her weapon as she realized that one man could do this much damage. Jura felt like her stomach was going to loosen all the food she had in her body. Meia herself managed to keep a straight face, but she too felt a shiver go up her spine at the sightâ€|if that Spartan could do this much damage to an unknown forceâ€|what could he have inflicted if he had been their enemy.

As they walked in and saw the carnage in more vivid detail, many of them were still trying not to lose their lunches at the sight.

They then spot one of the units moveâ€|as if trying to get away and continue it's mission, but with it's right arm ripped off above the elbow, it's legs ripped off, and it's left arm mangled, it was not getting to go anywhere, plus it still trailed a large stream of it's fluids. Then the Spartan showed upâ€|

The women who had never met the man gasped at the sight of the armor man who was seven feet tall, and they were horrified as the Spartan simply walked over to the unit trying to escape and he placed his Assault Rifle on the back of the unit's head and pulled the trigger.

The sounds of gun-fire filled the air and the sounds of flying liquid filled the room as the women reached for their weapons and aimed it at the Spartan as he finished off the last of the invaders. The captain and the Commander were all tense as the Spartan turned to look at them. He then walked over towards them, with his rifle in his hands. The women were still very tense as the Spartan was now only a few feet from them. Barnette was tense as she looked at the massive Spartan, while Jura kept her hand on her sword, Meia aimed her laser ring at him, and Gascogne kept herself ready and the security personnel were very wary of him.

Duero and Hibiki however were stunned and looked only at the Spartan, they couldn't see his face with his helmet on, but they were hoping that he was not going to suddenly turn on them as well.

Magno however gave them the order to stand down. After seeing actual evidence of how lethal the Spartan was in combat and the utter carnage he could inflict, she doubted that anyone in her crew could take this man head on, if he wanted to protect Cortana and eliminate them to take over the shipâ€|then she had no doubt that he was more than capable of accomplishing just that.

Their fears however were put to rest as the Spartan placed his Assault Rifle on his back and then saluted Magno and spoke in a professional, military voice.

"All hostile forces have been eliminated ma'am, you're ship has been secured."

Magno nodded and decided to follow military tradition and saluted the Spartan and gave her thanks.

"Thank you for helping us defend the ship John."

"Not a problem ma'am."

The Spartan then left the room, accompanied by Cortana, while the other women gave the Spartan a wide area to pass through, not even the man hating Barnette was willing to try and get in the way of the massive and tall giant of destruction and death. As she looked at the back of the Spartanâ€|Magno sighed with relief and slight unease.

This whole situation was going to take a LOT of getting used toâ€|

-----

To be continuedâ€|

Author's notes:

This is it for today as I have other things to take care of so I hope that you readers would like the story as I take a break and made up more ideas for the plot of VanDread â€" Halo.

-----

The Mjolnir Mark VI has been fully upgraded to maximize it's combat effectiveness in this new environment and the new enemies he will be encountering the VanDread universe, plus other deadly threats to both him and the Megele pirates as they will make their way in the universe.

It now has stronger and more resistant shields and could have more energy and recharge much faster than before, the medical system has been fully improved so it could do well in healing injuries the Chief might sustain, it has much tougher armor plating then beforeâ€|without being bulky and retaining the same shape and form, giving him greater protection in the chance that his shields are completely drained and need time to recharge. It has an improved hydrostatic gel layer for better protection from heat, cold, and impact trauma, an increased breathing supply of air at a maximum of 240 minutes, an improved reactive metal liquid crystal that increased the speed and strength of the Spartan, and an improved fusion reactor to provide efficient amounts of power to run all the systems.

Those, along with improved onboard systems will make this Mark VI the most advanced powered armor suit of this story, and will be an edge in several soon to come battles with the Harvesters and their forcesâ€|but things will not be easy still as there will be times that even this newly upgraded Mark VI will be put through it's paces very strongly, so it's performance will still be upgraded to utilize the new features

-----

If you're wondering why the Master Chief seemed to be unstoppable in the first encounter, then don't wonder for too long. Don't forget that this was only the initial encounter between the Harvesters and the UNSC Spartan and the Harvesters are not going to forget this battle anytime soon, they will learn from this and come up with ways to counter the Spartan and his arsenals.

This naturally means that in the coming chapters, there will be some new units in the Harvesters' arsenals and the ones already sent will adapt and become more effective fighters in the coming encounters. So the Master Chief will not always have it this easy in the soon to come battles.

The original Harvesters in VanDread did develop newer weapons when they fought the pirates in the series and modified their existing onesâ€|and therefore, the same could be said of their forces when they face off with the Spartan, they will adapt and grow stronger in the coming battles.

-----

Wellâ€|that wraps up this chapter for todayâ€|I'll be taking a break for a while so take you're time and send me those comments and reviews and like beforeâ€|keep in mind that constructive critiques are welcome so I can see if any errors were made in the making of the story and chapters.

Howeverâ€|no flames, and if I get some, I will throw them out immediately.

See you on Chapter 3 â€" Trash Disposal.

#### 4. Chapter 4

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: The Halo series belongs to Bungie, and VanDread belongs to Gonzo, I am not making any amounts of money out of the series and this story.

Chapter 3

Trash Disposal

/ \: Thoughts

/ "Conversations"\: Paeksis conversations

-----

In an unknown sector of spaceâ€|

The still transforming combination of ships was still there on it's current location, with the ruined husk of the alien ship a fair distance away, and for the time being, it seemed that things had finally calmed down and no sign of more attacking forces had been detected by the pirates, this naturally didn't meant that everything was going to be all right however.

-----

In one section of the now transformed shipâ€|

"WHAT HAS IT DONE TO MY ROOM?!"

Both Barnette and Jura shouted in shock as they had found their respective rooms totally changed and covered by the Paeksis, however, they were not the only ones as the crystal had literally converted the entire Megele ship into something else.

-----

In the Conference Room of the shipâ€¦

"Our Megele cruiser has been fully converted and swallowed by the Paeksis Captain, The bridge, the Living Quarters, and the Engine rooms have been completely altered and cannot be accessed. The good news is that the Dread Launching Bay and the Register system have taken less to no damage and we are in the process of installing the new software and information now, along with clean up and modifications work. The transformations done by the Paeksis have also finally ceased and things seem to have calmed down somewhat as most of it's spread has died down. The bridge we will be using now Captain has finished sliding and is now on top of the ship's bio-garden. All changes to the ship has also ceased as well. You're report Meia?"

Buzam reported as she showed the others the images of the changes that Paeksis had done, in the Conference Room were not only Buzam, but Magno, Meia, and Cortana as well.

"Thank you Buzamâ€¦the three Dreads that were consumed and transformed by the Paeksis including my own no longer can be launched from the Dread Launching Bays due to their size and new design, as such, we have decided to have them launch and be stored from the Cargo Bay on the men's side of the ship, though modifications to the Cargo Bay were needed. While we did so, we made some discoveries about the ship's condition, and it's not good, the ship has not been used in very long time and most of the circuits and wires are decayed and useless, and will need to be replaced soon."

"Hmmmâ€¦anything else to report BC?"

"Yesâ€¦it appears that the Paeksis has also affected the ship section that the men had tried to acquire, and we have send some of our people there as wellâ€¦However since the ship appears to be of UNSC design, we had Cortana brought with us to begin the major assessment of the transformations Captainâ€¦she will give the report herself to you."

Magno then turned to Cortana and smiled.

"I guess it's you're turn dear."

Cortana smirked slightly and showed images of the UNSC Frigate that had merged with the Ikazuchi.

"The Forward Unto Dawn has been fully melded with the Ikazuchi Colony ship and most of the designs of the UNSC frigate have been accessed by the Paeksis from the data cores to rebuild and meld it from thereâ€¦this isn't the first time a UNSC ship was melded onto another shipâ€¦we did that before with the Covenant flagship, the Ascendant Justice at one time with the UNSC Gettysburg though that was done with the aid of Covenant Engineers."

"The Living Quarters have also melded with the colony ship's own, so in all, the melded ship has the ability to house at least 300 to 350 people, with all the basic amenities and utilities as well, that also includes showers and locker rooms as well. The Training and Recreation Rooms are also there as well, along all the needed equipment and gear. The HEV Bay is also present and all pods are ready with full supplies and gear for aerial insertion into the battle-zone."

"What are HEVS?" Meia asked.

"The HEV is the shorter terms for the Human Entry Vehicle—essentially it's a one person pod with supplies, ammunition, a stored cubicle, and some weapons that is deployed with one ODST inside and is constructed from Titanium-A, Lead Foil, and ceramic skin. The HEV is used by ODSTs as one of their more recognized methods of insertion to the surface of a planet for rapid deployment to or near an objective. They are smaller and travel very quickly—minimizing the risk that they are shot down by anti-air defenses. And the supplies and shelter means the soldier can fight from the cubicle without need for re-supply for a time."

"But the HEVs can malfunction in a few ways, the metal drag chute won't open and the pod will not slow down and stay on course and send the pod crashing down, or the secondary chute will not also work once the main one is released after providing deceleration and crashing to the ground, or the retro rockets that re for landing don't fire, and the ceramics skin may not be enough to keep the occupant from dying from the intense heat of re-entry."

The women looked at the HEV pods and shuddered at the thoughts of being in one of those things—how did human beings in the UNSC military survive being in them/

"Who uses the HEVs?"

"The ODSTs or Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, they have other methods of entry into an objective area, but the HEVs are quite the most common. They are a co-gender force, like the UNSC Marine Corps, so it's not surprising to find female ODSTs who ride the HEVs, they are all volunteers and apart from the Spartans, are the elite fighting Special Forces of the UNSC Marine Corps. The rest of the ship has been fully rebuilt as well—the Garage and Vehicle Hanger is still there, fully rebuilt from the specs up by the Paeksis, along with the Armory stations that have been made by the Paeksis as well. The cryo-tubes are still fully functional and ready for use, just case we need long term travels."

"The mess halls and the kitchens are still very much rebuilt, and the Paeksis has added several new features to the ship—namely in the shape of manufacturing facilities for personal weapons, armor, ammunition, personnel field equipment, medical kits, vehicle ammunition, vehicle engine parts, vehicle armor, vehicle systems and the chassis, and vehicle weapon systems, along with other—more lethal weapon systems. So far the factories have been able to restock the Frigate's Armory stations with full weapons, armor, equipment, medical supplies, and ammunition, along with several new Warthogs, Scorpion MBTs, Mongoose ATVs for the vehicle Hanger and the Garage, along with several newly created Pelican Drop-ships, two Clarion spy drones, one functional Albatross drop-ship/command ship, and a small

band of Longsword fighters, ready for combat. The Paeksis also managed to create several of the Archer missile pods that we had on the Frigate, but they are not yet fully functional, the Paeksis even managed to get the data concerning the creation of an MAC gun and we have at least two MAC guns on the lower front of the ship, however those are not yet operational as we still need to have the ammunition for them."

"MAC gun?" Magno asked with a curious look.

"The MAC gun or the Magnetic Accelerator Cannon is a basic armament for any UNSC ship, it's essentially a massive coil gun that is used to fire a massive slug of high density metal like tungsten or depleted uranium with the aid of massive magnetic coils, suffice to say, most human ships and unshielded Covenant ships would be in serious trouble if hit by it. The Paeksis provides more than enough power for the guns along with the newly restored deuterium fusion cores on the Frigate, though the Paeksis still hasn't been fully active and controllable yet. The MAC gun design is in various formsâ€|the largest can slice through a Covenant ship like it was butter. However the MAC guns are purely stationary and are not meant to be used on fighter sized targets and fast moving ones as well. It seems that Bart is not allowed to use the MAC gunsâ€|but I can as I have been able to find out. The sad thing is that we don't have the Slipspace drives functionalâ€|they took too much damage from the escape we had back in our dimension when we fired Halo beyond the Milky Way, and even the Paeksis can't fix it yet, by my estimation, it would take about a year and a half for them to fully back on operational status and even then, I'm not sure of the physics laws that Slipspace works with exist here in this universe, so even if I can access the Slipspace drives, I don't know if it will work, plus I need coordinates to use them properly. The factories can also produce other things, and I might even manage to make some Covenant based equipment as well, though that will take some time to doâ€|"

"Overall, the resources of the UNSC are ready for any battle field scenario we find ourselves hip deep in."

Magno nodded as Cortana finished her reports and she turned to face Buzam.

"And what's our current location BC?"

"That I'm afraid is the hard part Captainâ€|we seem to be in an entirely different nebula and therefore it would mean we are very much out of the system that has Tarak and Megele, and according to our current data analysis, it will take at least 270 days for us to return home Captain."

Magno sighed as she fanned herself with her paper fan, due to the situation they were in, power supply was still questionable. Thus, they had to cut down overuse of several systemsâ€|one of them being the air-conditioning system and the elderly woman knew for a fact that a good number of her crew would already be complaining about the heat, and yet they could do little until all of the needed work was completed.

"Why did we get to have ourselves slingshot halfway across the universe and wind up like this?" By the wayâ€|have we managed to

convince John to take a physical examination and some tests?"

Buzam nodded.

"He's currently in an unused portion of the ship and is being attended by several of our security teams, along with Duero—we had to use a heavy lifter to carry his Mjolnir Mark VI to the Engineering section for analysis and study Captain, once we got him out of the suit."

"A heavy lifter?"

"I'm afraid so—that powered suit of his nearly weighed at least one thousand pounds—nearly a ton! There was no way for anyone, even Gascogne to take the suit to the Engineering section for study with just their bare hands."

Magno was surprised that the Armor weighed that much, if the Spartan could move that fast and fight that well in such a suit, then it must be truly advanced for such a suit.

Cortana sighed mentally, normally she would have not allowed the Mjolnir to be in unknown hands, but she and John had little choice at this point to argue it over, and the people in the pirates were at this point, not their enemies—she however knew that any attempt that the women would try to replicate the Mjolnir would be met with failure, the Mjolnir got it's namesake for a very good reason, as only Spartans could wear the suit and use it to it's full power, anyone who didn't have the Spartan's augmentations risked severe/critical injuries, or death if they tried to use it, that much she already knew and learned about. So far however, with the ship still in a mess, she was to be out of the holo-tank and had to do her best to help out with the maintenance of the ship. As such, she decided to help with the repairs of the Register, this would help her get familiar with just how the ship operates.

"So what about the enemy we faced today—what's the information we can get out of the wreckage, plus the—bodies of the boarders?"

Cortana took over at this point.

"The Engineers have managed to get as much of the still intact and relatively whole bodies of the boarders and have made sure to keep them offline to prevent sudden activations from them. So far, all we can say is that they are biomechanical and have none of the normal organs that we could use to consider them living, but their internal systems function close to the real thing as well. The Engineers should have the data within the hour. Though I can bet you're cleaning crews are not going to be happy in cleaning up the mess John left behind."

Magno chuckled at the joke and looked at Meia.

Meia looked a bit startled but followed through and gave her own report.

"My teams is still under staffed at this point with Jura moving out her possessions as her room was among those affected by the Paeksis when it absorbed the living quarters, and with the Register and the

Dread Launching Bays still being cleaned and being installed their new information, I can't send out any of the other pilots as well, so I had to send out some volunteers to check out the site."

Magno was a bit confused as to why Meia seemed a bit unsure about the ones she had just sent out to get some information from the wreckage of the alien ship.

"Volunteers? Just who did you send out?"

-----

In a certain Dread

"Wow this is so exciting! I'm finally going to see the insides of a real UFO!"

Dita Liebely was very excited at being selected to go to the wreckage of the alien ship that had led the attack on the ship earlier, along with her was Gascogne who was not very enthusiastic with the whole idea, while she had nothing against the bubbly and cheerful redhead, she was not very comfortable with being with Dita as she might have to not only work to get the data they needed, but to babysit the excitable redhead as well.

Dita then turned to look at the side and took out her trusty camera and called out to her passenger.

"There! That was an Adamsky type UFO! Did you see it Miss Gasco?"

Gascogne sighed once more and hoped that it would be over soon since she had to help out with the setting up of the new Register.

-----

In yet another part of the ship

The Master Chief was busy with his latest battery of tests, the high command of the pirates had requested him to be examined by Duero in order to see his full capabilities. This actually was not the first time this had happened to him in his life. When he was fresh out of his augmentations, he had been scanned and tested by the scientists and military analysts on Reach, so this was not very new for him.

The one thing that was different was the fact that he was not wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI Powered Armor Combat Suit and was only dressed in the same clothes as the UNSC Marines wore, and thus for the first time in many years before wearing the Mark VI he was now out of his Armor and the results of his time spent in wearing the Armor was seen.

John-117 was pale, snow white pale, a testament of his long time inside the Mjolnir Armor, namely the Mark IV, the Mark V, and now the Mark VI, though the Mark IV was the one that he wore the longest above the others. He had deep green eyes, and the same brown hair he normally had, though it had been shaved, keeping up to UNSC Marine



Corps regulations, it was not surprising that his hair was now in a short style cut, and his freckles had disappeared over the years as well. And the gap between his teeth had already closed, making him appear like a pale but attractive man, though he hardly had the time to look at a mirror. His body however had the build of a soldier, slim, but well muscled and properly formed in all the right places, a testament to his lifelong regime of combat, training, discipline, and hard work. The fact was that despite not being in the Mark VI armor, the Spartan was far stronger than a normal human being, far greater than any of the crew for that matter. Without the Mark VI, he was in his normal height of 6'6 and was only around 287 pounds in weight.

The women who were escorting him to the testing area were shocked to see him so pale without the Armor and wondered briefly if he was a ghost, and they looked at the signs of scars on him, yet another indication of his status as a soldier of the UNSC. The women were commenting that with his pale skin, he looked rather ugly and scary with those scars, but he paid them very little mind as he faced the young doctor from Tarak.

Duero looked over the equipment one more time and made sure that they were all ready. The Tarak medic had been hosed down by the Megele pirates in their version of the decontamination process, along with Bart and Hibiki, and he recalled how angry Hibiki was as well as how Bart yelled, he could understand the anger and discomfort as the women had used very cold water to decontaminate them, though how cold water would kill the so-called germs that they had was beyond him as it clashed with the medical practices of his own home world. He was the only Tarak male out of the cell, while Hibiki and Bart were still in the prison cell, once he was done with the tests, he was to head back to the cell and await the decision from the Captain and Buzam concerning him and the other two men from his home planet.

He put those thoughts aside as he finally was ready to begin the tests on the Spartan, though he also took the time to study the women who were there to keep an eye on both him and the Spartan as he still wondered just what was it about women that got his attention. He then decided to do his duty and focus on his tasks and attention on the Super Soldier.

Like the women, he was stunned to see how utterly pale the Spartan was when he was bare of the Mark VI Armor, but didn't dwell on it. The tests were going to be in two stages, the first was the one they were working on right now—which was to test the Spartan's physical abilities and traits, namely his speed, reflexes, strength, eye-sight, and more. Though he had heard about what the Spartan was capable of due to the augmentations he had been subjected to as a child, the doctor still wanted to see those abilities in action. He then noted the slight look of discomfort on his patient.

"What's wrong?"

"Don't feel very comfortable right now."

The Tarak medic was confused at first, but then realized that the Spartan must have been referring to the fact that he was not wearing his Mjolnir Armor. The medic then guessed correctly that the Spartan was more comfortable in the Mjolnir than any other form of clothing or suit and therefore was not very happy with being forced to leave

it.

"Don't worry, the Mark VI is with the Engineering group and they're going to make sure to keep it in good condition, now then, are you ready for the tests?"

"As I'll ever beâ€|"

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

Amarone turned and looked at Ezra while Celtic's position was occupied by what appeared to be a massive bear costume, the dark haired and dark skinned girl was curious as to why Ezra seemed to be a lot more tired than she normally was.

"Are you feeling all right Ezra?"

"I'm fineâ€|just a little tired."

Amarone sighed and replied to her friend as she sat down.

"I know what you mean."

Belvedere was very uncomfortable in the heat and tried to fan herself with a small card, but was not getting anywhere fast as the heat seemed to grow even hotter than before in the bridge. And she was getting even more frustrated by the temperature.

"What's going on with the air-conditioning?! It's so hot in here!"

She then activated the communications system and contacted the Engineering section of the ship and decided to complain as to why the bridge felt like a hot sauna bath.

"Could you do something about the heat up here? It's nearly 31 degrees in here!"

-----

Engineeringâ€|

"We're not having any luck in here either you know, it's already 36 degrees here with us too, so stop complaining!"

The answering engineer replied to Belvedere's complaint as her fellow engineer went over to speak to Parfet, who was still in her space suit, taking advantage of the protection and the temperature regulation systems as she worked on the Paeksis.

"I'm still not getting much response, how about you Parfet?"

In the reactor room, Parfet was still busy wither work in trying to figure out how to control and repair the Paeksis core.

"The system running the Paeksis is so ancientâ€|it must be some prototype, that must explain a lot on why it's power seems to spike up a lot, won't it?"

The engineer then turned as another engineer called for assistance.

"Hey! Come on and help me out over here!"

The engineer was having a lot of difficulty as she was trying to keep a certain Navi-robot from buckling free from her grip, the Navi-robot was supposed to help them interpret the data and language of the men, however the Navi-robot was far from being cooperative.

"Let go of me!!!!"

"Hold still will you!? How are we supposed to interpret the data if you keep trying to get away?!"

The bodies that could be salvaged from the battle where the Spartan was were also there—waiting for their turn to be examined, even several containers filled with the magenta colored 'blood' were there, and nearby was the Mjolnir Mark VI. When the other engineers saw the suit, it sent goose-bumps up their skin and chills on their spines just by looking at the suit, but Parfet was eager to find out as much as she possibly could about the massive and intimidating armor once she was done trying to figure out what was wrong with the Paeksis.

-----

Meanwhile—

Paiway was busy riding an elevator as the rest of the Megele pirates were busy making the needed operations in order to move their supplies, equipment, and possessions to the new sections of the ship, thus quite a lot of things were happening in front of the preconscious eleven year old nurse, who was supposed to be in the Medical Bay, and she was recording everything, but like before, she was busy making a story about the whole thing.

She was being called at by her fellow pirates more than once to help them out and do something—to which she replied that she was doing something and that was diary work.

She then turned to the side as Barnette and Jura arrived, with a good amount of their belongings in their hands. The two best friends were not happy with the fact that they would have to leave their old rooms and move to new ones, as she placed down the heavier parts of her gun collection, Barnette was not happy to see that Paiway was once more slacking off and not helping the others out with the mess they were currently in.

"Are you slacking off again Paiway?"

Jura likewise was not very happy with the fact that she had to move out of her room and seeing that Paiway was not contributing to helping out the others, she also scolded the young girl alongside Barnette.

"Instead of just sitting there and writing, why don't you do something that can be helpful."

Paiway however had an answer to that question as she looked at her two fellow pirates and showed them her book.

"I am doing something you knowâ€|"

She then took her frog bag and began to speak to in the very same way a ventriloquist would throw his/her voice to another object and make it seem that it was doing the talking, however, she was still new to the art as she opened her mouth while doing so..

"Barnette and Jura sure have a lot of stuff, don't they?"

She then turned to face her own puppet and spoke in her normal voice.

"I'm happy that our room wasn't affected so we don't have to move, right?"

"Kero!"

Jura glared at the young girl and spoke to only Barnette.

"She's really pushing my buttons againâ€|"

"You're not really helping at all right nowâ€|you know that Paiway."

That was when Barnette then noted that there seemed to be a rope tied to Paiway's waist, she wondered why would the young girl would need a rope on her waist when she was already on an elevator.

"What's that rope doing on you're waist anyway Paiway?"

"This elevator's only a temporary one, so it won't be my fault if suddenly stops, breaks down and falls down, that means you're on your own from here on out, bye. Kero!"

Paiway said as she was then lifted off the elevator by the rope and waved to both Barnette and Jura, who were understandably shocked to learn that they were on a possibly malfunctioning elevator and they looked at one another and fervently hoped that the young nurse was not being serious and only playing around with them.

-----

In the unused section of the shipâ€|

John-117 checked his MA5C and made sure to take out a maintenance kit to clean the weapon and to keep the weapon he wielded in good condition, and he then deactivated the electronic suite on the weapon and then took the weapon apart and began to clean it, moving at a speed that made his observers wonder if he was a cyborg. He had already disassembled a Tarak assault rifle with amazing speed and accuracy, he then reassembled the weapon with amazing accuracy and then he fired the weapon at a small target, with the weapon working in perfect order, showing that the Spartan was indeed very skilled, he then did the very same thing to a Megele made laser rifle, one of the women showed him a diagram of how a Megele laser rifle was made and constructed. He studied the blue print intently and was able to

disassemble the weapon with notable accuracy, and he then reassembled the weapon and fired it at the next targetâ€|hitting the target dead centerâ€|and the weapon functioned well, without complicationsâ€|further making the women even more stunned at how rapidly the male was able to master the weapon that their world used exclusively.

They were not aware of the fact that John, like his fellow Spartans, had received a particular surgical augmentation known to the surgeons and specialists in the Spartan II Program as the Superconducting fabrication of neural dendrites, or in more simple terms, the augmentation altered the normal bioelectrical nerve transduction associated with normal humans to shielded electronic transduction. This naturally had an effect of increasing the subject's reflexes by three hundred percent, along with a marked high increase in the subject's intelligence, memory, and creativity. This meant that as soon as he had the basic data shown to him, John was able to understand how something functions and how he can best use itâ€|or if needed and if possibleâ€|modify it somewhat to be a lot more effective in it's original functions.

The procedure however was extremely painful and like all Spartan augmentations, had considerable risks, including increased risks to suffering Parkinson's disease and Fletcher's Syndrome. He was able to adapt and grew quite skilled at the augmentation, though the others were far better than him.

As John finished his work in the UNSC weapon, he quickly reassembled it and got into firing position and fired at the third target with good accuracy at the range he was given. As he was done, he turned to face those who were still observing him, namely Duero and the other women security members. He then placed the weapon on the table and activated the safety feature as he faced the young doctor.

"Got the data you need?"

Duero nodded as he added the last bit of data into the computers and began to have it made in the required order for the records to have. The Tarak doctor may have had a calm façade throughout the entire session, unlike the women who were constantly stunned, amazed, and a bit terrified, but he was very much still amazed at the things he had seen the Spartan doâ€|without the Mjolnir Mark VI, further adding weight to what he had said before in the room about what he was very much capable of doing, even without the Mark VI on.

"Yes, the computer should finish all the data compilations within half an hour. I should get going back to the cells"

This naturally got John's attention as he looked as the doctor was once more restrained.

"Why's that?"

Duero answered the Spartan as he was being led away by the women security personnel, while two others stayed closer to the Spartan to keep watch over him with heavy laser riflesâ€|apparently, despite the fact that he was bare of the Mjolnir, none of the women were ready to take any risks concerning him of all people.

"I am still a prisoner John, so I have to be sent back with the other

men. "

John looked on as Duero was being taken back to the prison cells where Bart and Hibiki were. He then decided to keep the other men company, even though he was not a man from Tarak and was not bound as a prisoner, at least by most standards. He faced his escorts and placed out his arms, confusing the women as to what was it he was trying to say. He then simply replied to the question of the women with the same patient tone.

"I'll keep them company."

Realizing that they would have no further argument, the women then decided to manacle the Spartan as he was guided alongside Duero to the section where the cells were located. The Spartan wanted to keep the women of Megele calm about the situation, as they might still think of him as a freak. While he had dealt with that kind of stigma for quite a long time in the UNSC, he was in a whole new world, and the women would be highly uncomfortable with someone of his caliber wandering their ship with impunity. He decided to keep his cool and focus on doing what he could while he and Cortana were under the Captain of this ship.

The women had already subjected the three Tarak men to their form of decontamination as he was there to see it, they however stayed clear of him as they didn't subject him to that kind of procedure, showing that they were afraid of what his reactions would be if they tried it on him, as some of the women who were doing the decontamination of the men were among those who had seen the utter carnage he had inflicted on the aliens that had boarded their ship a few hours before.

As they arrived in the area, he turned and spotted Cortana as the former UNSC AI was busy running through a checklist on the items she had been able to list down on the UNSC section of the ship. The former AI then walked over to him and sighed as she noted the manacles on his wrists.

"They still don't trust you John?"

"Not really, figured I'll keep the men company for a bit until the others make up their minds on what to do with them."

Cortana sighed as she joined the Spartan as they all went back to the cell, once there, she decided to ask his leave and she then headed off to the UNSC section of the ship to make a quick inventory checklist to make sure that everything was in good conditionâ€|leaving John along with Hibiki, Bart, and Dueroâ€|and all four men were now being monitored by the two female officers.

-----

In the Conference Roomâ€|

"Soâ€|have you been able to find out anything about those units that tried to board our ship Parfait?"

The two head officers listened as they were finally able to get word from the head engineer that she had been able to make some head way

in studying the bodies of the alien soldiers that had been sent to attack their ship from within, and they were halted and annihilated by the UNSC Spartan. The two women were very anxious as to what these units were able to do and what they wereâ€¦and finally, who were the ones who made these biomechanical units.

"These units seem to have some form of manufactured flesh to act as an overall cover for the body and to regulate the fluid we've found. The magenta fluid is actually a highly advanced energy solution that acts like a combination of lubricant, fuel, and coolant at the same time, the power cell inside the chest region seems to charge the fluid with minute but powerful amounts of energy, the fluid then transfers the energy all over the body the same way our blood sends nutrients, and oxygen throughout the body as well. The fluid also seems to fuel the plasma weapon that they have as their main ranged weapon."

"Can you tell us anything about the rest of the thing's features?"

"The 'eyes' appear to be a set of cameras that have a set number of settings, allowing them to have exceptional vision capabilities, though these seem to be sealed. Apparently the designers merely programmed them to search and destroy anything they see. The plasma weapon used high grade energy condensers to create the plasma, and super heat it, and the magnetic field generators can shape and fire them at high velocities, and the damage to a human would have been horrific. The blade on their left arm is very strong and solid, so this is purely designed for close combat and seems sharp enough to slice through our space suits. These machines seem to have some sort of armor that is grafted into their bodies."

"Anything on what the armor is and how much damage can it sustain?"

"Wellâ€¦it seems to have some ablative properties to dissipate heat, namely from energy based attacks, I've tested both out laser rifles and laser rings on it and it seems to have a considerable tolerance to those energy weapons before it collapsed, there's also some sort of coating solution that's on the artificial flesh that is somewhat refractive towards energy weapons. This means that whoever designed these units made sure that they could withstand energy weapons, including our lasers, it would still be over powered, but with sufficient numbers, they would have overwhelmed our ship and the crew in an hour. However, seemed that the armor and coating were not made to withstand solid weapons, I've tested the Tarak weapons and found them to be effective on the armor of these units, and since the Spartan's weapons are all projectile based, they were able to inflict this much damage on them."

"Hmâ€¦can you make any modifications to our weapons so we can be able to fight these things just on the off chance we encounter them once more Parfait?"

"I can try, it might take a lot longer since it would mean we will need to re-design the laser weapons on the ship though."

"Better to have options just in caseâ€¦what about that Spartan's armor Parfait, did you manage to have enough time to study it?"

The head engineer shook her head and replied.

"I haven't gotten the time to study it properly Captain, since I have no data to work with, but I can give out some of the findings. The suit appears to have a very powerful fusion reactor as it's main source of power and it seems that the suit has a large array of features to make it a highly effective defensive system. The armor plating seems to be a combination of high quality reinforced titanium that has been chemically treated with a high degree refractive coating to increase it's resistance to energy weapons fire, including our lasers, and the thickness of the plating gives it considerable resistance to solid weapons as well, and a special alloy/ceramic mix armor skin that doubles it's protection. It has powerful shields, of a design that appears human built, but of a level I've never seen before, they are quite resistant and rapidly recharge after being struck, the suit also has some sort of metal crystal in liquid form, it's something I've never seen beforeâ€¦from what I can seeâ€¦it can adhere to a person's frame and enhance locomotion, and flawlessly enhances both the strength and speed of the user. I have managed to determine that it has compartments to store ammunition and explosive weapons, and magnetic pads on the things, waist, and back to hold onto weapons and other items, and magnetic pads on the boots to move on the surface of a ship in deep space. There's also some sort of built in medical treatment system that can heal minor to moderate woundsâ€¦and some sort of material weave that I've never seen before, almost like the memory core of a high grade super computer, but much faster and stores more memory."

"This suit is very advanced and all this data is what I can find with some searching, but there is so much more information in this suit's systems that I can't access. The only way I can do anything with this study is if someone who knows how this suit works is in here to help me as well."

Buzam and Magno looked at one another and then the elderly Captain decided to ask the head engineer the important question.

"I know you don't have that much data yet about this suit Parfaitâ€¦but can you access it and try to copy it's designs?"

Parfet shook her head.

"I don't think I can do it here or even on Megele Captainâ€¦this suit's unlike anything I've ever seen beforeâ€¦whoever designed it knew what they were doing, and the suit is a very powerful systemâ€¦it's both a hazard suit, battle-armor, mobile computer drive, medical care system, and more rolled into oneâ€¦this makes even our world's most advanced military suits look like dresses. This must be horrendously expensive to make, I made some estimations and it would take almost ten times the salaries of EVERY member who worked for three or more years nonstop to pay for even just one of these systemsâ€¦plus, I don't think anyone on our crew can wear this thingâ€¦I've run it on a simulation and it appears that only someone with massive physical and mental process can handle itâ€¦as anyone who does not handle the qualifications would be critically injured or killed by the sheer power of the system."

Magno and Buzam were a bit unnerved by the information and then the commander recalled what John had said about him being augmented in



biological and cybernetic areas, and what were the results of those said augmentations.

"Do you think his augmentations were the reason he could use that armor as if it was merely a simple suit Captain?"

"I guess soâ€¦and if that is trueâ€¦then he is not one we can mess with, even without the armor, I just hope that we can at the very least gauge some of those abilities once the young doctor comes back with the results of the examinations. Thank you Parfait, keep up the good work."

"Thank you captain!"

The two then looked at a certain image of a cell that had four men in it.

"So these are the only men we have on the ship? Not much to work with from the looks of it."

Buzam looked at the image of the three Tarak men and the UNSC Spartan, the sub commander had to admit that while he was out of his Mark VI, John-117 looked like normal male from Tarak with his height, form, and gender, minus the fact that unlike the three men who were tanned, he was as pale as Megele snow, a testament to how long he must have been wearing the Mjolnir Mark VI Armor.

"It seems we'll need to rely on them until we can better understand the functions of this ship's new systems Captain."

"That's trueâ€¦I never saw anything like before in my whole years in this lifetimeâ€¦it was as if this ship had a will of it's own somehow, it's very unnerving."

The elderly woman referred to the time after the fighting had ceased out there in space, along with the fighting within the ship as well. The Navigation Well then released the young cadet named Bart Garsus and deposited him to the floor.

Buzam however had a far more important concernâ€¦one UNSC Spartan, she then focused the camera on the Spartan as he was sitting there on the floor of the cell. After seeing the utter carnage this one lone man could do on his own, she was fearful that as long as he was not kept under surveillance, he might decide to rebel. She felt that it would be best for him to be given some sort of duty onboard the ship in order to keep him under their watchful eye and to make sure that he was not going to fight them. She knew enough from what she had heard and seen of John to know that he followed the chain of command without question, and considering how protective he was of his female companion Cortana, he was human being despite his military skills and abilities that bordered on superhuman, or was beyond thatâ€¦still it made her uneasy that he was onboard.

"Captainâ€¦what will we do with Cortana and her friend, that Spartan? He could be a very valuable allyâ€¦or a dangerous enemy to us."

"I can understand you're concern BC, he is a powerful and dangerous manâ€¦unlike those three kids from Tarakâ€¦I have no doubt that John is more than capable of taking us on and defeating us. If there was such a project on Tarak that created soldiers like him, then things

would have been very different for us if we had taken the Ikazuchi and they were onboard. There would have been very significant losses and worse for us. However, we do have several things going for us."

"Such as?"

"One, he does not consider us his enemies since he is a soldier who fought to protect humanity in his world and time. As such, he won't fight unless he is threatened. Two, he has no place to go, and neither does Cortana, and for now, we are the only people he knows, I hardly think he would know anyone in this universe who could help him. And lastly, he will not leave Cortana anywhere, and as long as she is here and is unharmed, then he will not try to fight usâ€|besides, I don't think he was ever trained in his younger days to kill civilians, while we are pirates, I believe he considers us as civilians and non-combatants. Going against that will be a violation of his military training and discipline, not to mention his humanity. However, we cannot take advantage of those things, so we must be patient at best."

Buzam nodded a bit at the elderly woman's reasoning, though as to what will the Spartan be doing on the rest of the voyage was still a very difficult question to answer, but had to be answered soon as there was not much time left.

"So what do we do with him? He can't very well remain locked up for the rest of the voyage back to Megele and Tarakâ€|his combat expertise might come in handy, considering that we might face more hostile threats in this region of the universe. He did manage to defeat at least three dozen of the unknown boarders that tried to infiltrate the ship before."

Magno nodded as she recalled how skilled the Spartan was when it came to combat, and that could be helpful indeed. However, with things as they were, they didn't have a lot of time on their hands to find a proper place for the Spartan.

"We'll find a way to deal with that once the time comesâ€|now we have to deal another matterâ€|how to get this ship to move."

-----

In the cellâ€|

Bart was busy talking about how unnerving it was for him when the ship had been taken over, while his supposed audience which was of Hibiki, John, and Duero. The Spartan pretty much ignored the blonde cadet as he knew that the young man was being talkative merely to keep his nerves cool, and nothing was to be gained by either listening to him, or entertaining his ramblings.

However, Bart was not deterred by the silence that greeted his story and as soon as he was done, he waited for any response, but then directed his attention to Hibiki who was at this very moment, sulking in the corner.

/ I thought I was going to finally change my life for the betterâ€|but now I'm in this messâ€|what am I going to do now? And

what the heckâ€|?\\

"What the heck happened back there by the way?"

Hibiki broke his train of thought as he looked to find Bart looking at him with a very confused and suspicious look.

"What?"

"I was asking who made you're Vanguard, it certainly wasn't in the ship from I just saw and it doesn't match any of the production models, and why did somehow combine with the Megele fighter to turn into that last time?"

"How am I supposed to know how in the heck did it happen anyway?! Forget that! Don't think for a moment I'll let you get away for hitting me on the stomach with that elbow of yours!!!"

"Hey calm down, there's no need for you to be upset, I was only concerned for you're best interests."

Hibiki wasn't buying it and glared even harder at Bart.

"You really don't know when to shut up do you?! There's enoughâ€|" "

"And you're shouting's only going to make it worse Hibiki, so both of you cool yourselves and knock it off."

John said with a the slightest hint of impatience, as even the most guarded Spartan would be irritated with all the noise going on. That was also when Duero decided to diplomatically end this mess, though even he was getting annoyed by the words being exchanged between Bart and Hibiki, the situation was still very uncertain, and arguing was not going to help the situation.

"You both should try to forgive him, he's trying to keep his mind off the situation through conversations, it's a pretty normal reaction."

"You're pretty sharp Duero, so what do you guys think? Can we pull a special plan I have in mind off?"

John then gave the young Tarak cadet a tired look as he knew what this young guy was going to say before the words would even come out of his mouth.

"Let me guess, with the doc's brains, you're fast talking, Hibiki's Vanguard, and my combat abilities, we can beat the women and take over the ship, am I right?"

"Uhâ€|yeah, how did you know?"

The Spartan shrugged a bit as he answered the awed teen's question on as to how he had figured out what the blonde cadet had in mind, after all, he knew enough on his days as a soldier to deal with such things.

"Wasn't very hard, but you've got two things to worry about."

"And those are?"

"One, I am not from your world, so I have no quarrel with the women in this ship, and they are not my enemies. And two, you've broken the first rule of military intelligence and secrecy with that mouth of yours. If you plan to take the enemy on with a plan, make sure that they don't get any tactical information about it."

"Surely you're not going to tell them our plan?!"

"He doesn't need to, because we were here and already listening to begin with."

Bart gulped at the sound of that particular voice and then turned and found none other than Buzam A Calessa and a pair of her fellow female pirates looking at him with very serious and unfriendly expressions.

-----

In the Conference Room

Magno listened in to the incoming communications from Gascogne as the head of the Register began to deliver her report as she and Dita began to do their work, that is, Dita was busy recording the scene with her camera and moving around to explore the ship of the unknown alien forces that had attacked the ship.

"So Gascogne, what can you tell me about this ship that led the attack on us?"

"I can pretty much say that there is no way this ship belongs to the men, let alone being made by human hands, and to tell you the truth, I think this is more a factory than a ship."

"How so?"

"Well, the interior appears to be similar to an assembly and storage plant, which could explain why it was able to send those cube like things out that became those octopus like fighters that Meia and the others, including Dita and that Tarak kid fought with. This ship is a mobile platform that can pretty much handle most small scale operations by itself as well."

Dita was still moving about and looking at the rest of the ship and seemed to be very happy at the sights she was seeing right now.

"I see, how long will you be there?"

"There's not much to go on, the mecha that Dita's Dread and that Tarak kid's Vanguard turned into certainly did quite a number on this thing, which is why it's amazing this thing's still out here after all the damage it took. The data extraction will take us a lot longer and"

"Miss Gasco, can I take a look around, please?"

Dita deactivated the masking system on her space suit's face visor so Gascogne could see here, along with Magno as she was very much eager to explore the ship.

However, Gascogne was not in the mood to baby-sit the young woman all the time and made it clear to her companion that they had a job to do as she reached out with her hand and placed a finger on Dita's face plate and answered her question.

"Absolutely not Dita! We came here to do a job, not go around on a sight seeing tour!"

The Register head then pushed back on the face visor of the young girl and send her flying back, and since the young woman had not activated her suit's thrusters, it was understandable that she was unable to stop her momentum.

"Whoa! I can't stop!"

The elderly woman then got a call from Buzam and after finding out that her second in command had brought the navigator with her from the cell.

Magno sighed and smiled a bit as she then decided to let Gascogne and Dita complete their mission.

"All right then, call us once you've gone you're mission and head back to the ship as quickly as you can."

"Roger."

She then let the chair she sat on, move on a special tread and she left the Conference Room and was now riding her way down to the bridge and fanned herself a bit more as the chair locked into the Captain's section of the bridge—just as Bart was now in front of her. Buzam was naturally nearby to keep an eye on the young man to make sure that despite him still being manacled, he would try anything. That was when Cortana arrived on the scene, having completed her duties.

"Hello there—I hear that you want me to do something?"

The old woman nodded and pointed towards the navigation well. "Yes. That thing. We haven't been able to interface into it and operate it, so you'll have to tell us how you did it."

"Uhh—okay—yes of course. Given the current circumstances and my situation, I don't have much in terms of choice."

He held up his manacled hands, indicating to Buzam that he needed his hands to be free. The first officer complied and activated the release for the manacles as Cortana stood by and was curious as to how the Navigation Well functioned. Bart then moved to the direction of the well.

"Now listen very carefully. This is a male ship, so therefore only men are capable of operating it. So I suppose that it was rather fortunate that I was around. In fact, you could say that I'm indispensable to you and— whoa!!!!!!!"

At that point the well flared up and sucked the hapless man into it again.

Magno sighed as she leaned back and shook her head. "I really doubt I'll ever understand this system at all."

Cortana also replied.

"I'm not all that sure that we ever will anyway, if there's nothing else for me to doâ€¦I'll head off and take a break."

Inside the Navigation Well, Bart found himself once again naked and surrounded in the holographic display of the outer environment of the ship.

"Okayâ€¦ let's see hereâ€¦uhhhâ€¦okayâ€¦"

All of a sudden, the ship's systems and main drive system came online and the vessel leaped forward and began to accelerate away from the wreck of the alien vessel. The sudden movement caught everyone off guard as the inertia dampeners and stabilizers were unable to cope with the sudden movement. Jura and Barnette were thrown off their feet in the elevator and their possessions went scattering all over the place.

Back on the bridge, the crew tried to stop the ship but wasn't getting anywhere.

"The system just booted up and we're now on some unknown heading!" One of the bridge officers called out.

Magno wasn't in a good mood as she got in touch with Bart at the navigation well and shouted. "What in blazes did you just do in there?!"

The image showed Bart as he shook his head. "Hold on! I didn't do anything! The ship seems to be on auto pilot!"

Buzam then turned to Cortana who had managed to retain her balance well after the sudden acceleration and made a quick inquiry and indicated the holo-tank that Cortana had used a few hours before, during the battle.

"Can you try and log into the system and get the ship under control Cortana?"

The former UNSC AI looked at the holo-tank and quickly moved to it and then stood on top of the holo-tank as it registered her arrival and replied to Buzam's request.

"I can try, I might not be allowed into the system but I'll do what I can."

The holo-tank glowed brightly as it swallowed Cortana, the hatch covered it and the crystal on the top of the hatch glowed brightly as Cortana then appeared in her AI form. The female UNSC AI wasted no time and tried to hack into the main drives and systems and try to bring them under control, along with the ship's navigational systems. However she sighed and broke the connection and faced the two women.

"I can't get through the system, and there are suddenly new firewalls I can't seem breach no matter what route or method I try, apparently

the Paeksis has taken over most of the ship, and has cut off all main and emergency access paths from both the Navigation Well and my own section as wellâ€the only sections I can command are the UNSC sections and several other parts of the shipâ€but I can't get command of the engines and systemsâ€whatever the Paeksis is up toâ€neither me or Bart can do anything about it."

"What is the Paeksis up to this time?" The elderly Captain wondered as the ship raced out of the area.

-----

Back at the wreckage of the alien shipâ€

Gascogne watched as the data loader they had brought now reached the full numbers indicating the amounts of data was now fully transferred, the moment that the numbers stopped flashing, the data card was ejected from the unit, she wasted no time and took the card into her hands.

"All right, we've got what we came here forâ€let's hurry back to the ship, the sooner we're out of this wreck, the better off I'll be."

"Roger Miss Gasco."

As Dita made her way to the opening that she and the head supplier had gone through, using her suit's built in thrusters. However, the moment she looked out to where their ship wasâ€she gave a cry of shock as she didn't find the ship in the areaâ€just empty space.

As soon as Gascogne arrived and saw the situation, she wasted little time and began to try and establish a communications link with the ship once more. She had been somewhat concerned when there seemed to be no response to her calls after the data had been extracted and she and Dita were on their way out.

Something was apparently not right if the ship was no longer in the area.

-----

In the bridgeâ€

"Miss Gasco! Can you hear me? Miss Gasco?"

Ezra tried as best she could to re-establish contact with Gascogne, and Dita while the ship seemed to continue on with it's unknown heading, however, the monitors on her console showed only static as there seemed to be no way they could establish contact with the two that were suddenly left behind when the ship took off. She suddenly felt very faint and seemed to be sweating a lot more.

Buzam walked over to Belvedere and took stock of the situation and then gave the order to release the marker buoys so the others left behind could easily find them. The silver haired woman then turned quickly at the sound of Cortana's voice, which seemed to be in panic.

"Ezra! Are you all right?!" Cortana asked, just as Buzam reached the

now unconscious woman, and she too wondered what had happened to the young woman. Cortana could only see Ezra and couldn't check her vital signs herself. All UNSC personnel, regardless of rank and position were all armed with neural interface implants that could at least allow AI such as herself to monitor their vital signs, as she had done when they tried to rescue Captain Keyes when he was taken by the Flood. Since Ezra had no such implants, there was no way for her to determine what was wrong with her.

"I can't read her vital signs Commander Buzam since she has no neural interface implants I can detect, she needs to be in the Medical Bay ASAP!"

Cortana then turned to Magno and spoke calmly.

"I can still gain power from the fusion reactors in the UNSC section Captain, but I can't do much right now, even routing power from the cores is somehow disabled, but I will remain here and keep an eye on things that I can access."

Magno smiled a bit at the UNSC AI.

"Go ahead, keep us posted if you pick up anything."

"Rightâ€¦|hold onâ€¦|Oh my godâ€¦|the Paeksis is heading right towards that nebula at full speed!"

"Are you sure?!" Magno asked the UNSC AI as her crew also began to spot the nebula that the ship was heading towards at high speed.

-----

Back at the navigation wellâ€¦|

Bart was in full panic mode as he saw just where the Paeksis was heading towardsâ€¦|

"We're going in there?! How do I stop this crazy ship?!"

The ship didn't seem to care much about Bart's complaints and dove headlong into the mix of gases of the nebula's outer ring. Various chunks of ice and debris flew all around the ship and smacked into the hull of the fused vessel. Unfortunately for the cowardly Bart, due to the neural interface link between him and the ship, then anything that collided with the ship came to hit him in the form of PAIN. A stray chunk of ice smacked into the top near the bow, which caused him to yelp in pain. As the hit felt like a blow to his head and that threw him back a bit.

"Will somebody please raise the shields?!" he called out while rubbing his head.

Cortana however seemed to be shielded from the injuries as she does not suffer from the impacts. This meant that when she was in her AI form, she was still shielded from harm from the attacks on the ship, just like back on the Pillar of Autumn when it was being bombarded by the Covenant forces over the first Halo Ring they had found.



-----

Bart wasn't the only one with problems on the ship. At least ninety percent of all operating systems were offline. Parfait was informed as she was working on her last tests on both the bodies and the Mjolnir Mark VI that crystalline response was down by 45, further dampening the amounts of power and it seemed that getting power from the fusion cores of the UNSC frigate was not working, and the temperature had risenâ€|she went over to the engineer who was supposed to be checking the Navi-robotâ€|only to find the robot mumbling the word sick.

Jura and her buddy Barnette found themselves trapped inside the elevator, buried underneath their own possessions. They were in a rather difficult situation as along with their belongings, which were clothes and personal items, were also some firearms and live ammunition.

Meia on the other hand was in dismay as she had found out that the Dread platforms were also offline. That naturally meant that she couldn't send anyone to rescue Gascogne and Dita. And due to the fact that they were in a nebula nowâ€|it would be impossible for her to launch even her own Dread and Jura couldn't launch either as she was still trapped in the elevator.

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|a few minutes laterâ€|

Duero ran his checks on the young woman named Ezra, who according to what he had been told, had somehow fainted and was suffering a slight fever at the moment. He was currently running a scanner on the young woman which showed an image of the woman's body and he seemed to note some very peculiar patterns and signals from within the female. He had been brought out from the cell a few minutes before after he had been forced to do a make-shift medical checkup on Hibiki who had been mumbling something in his sleep.

The young boy reacted with understandable surprise when he saw the doctor leaning on him. John did nothing as he had his thoughts on other matters. After he had asked Hibiki who was this Grand Pa he kept mentioning while asleep, he was curious as to why it seemed that a First Class would actually associate with a Third Class Citizen, before he could get anymore information out of the young man, he was picked up by Buzam.

When he learned that he was supposed to examine the young woman who was on the Medical Bay bed, he was somewhat confused, as the women were supposed to be highly advanced in medical care and technology, why then would they need him? The commander smiled and commented that he indeed deserved to be of the First Class on Tarak, and told him of the current mess they were in right now and the power supply was still a mess, so they needed all the help they could getâ€|plus he might learn about women while he was here.

He agreed and was in his current situation as there was still power in the Medical Bayâ€|but that was not going to last long as the power suddenly faded out of the Medical Bay. He quickly took the communicator from the thigh holster of one of the Megele security girls, who was surprised and glared at him for doing that. However he

paid her no mind and quickly made a call to the Engineering Bay, he was not going to get anything done with his examination of Ezra if there was no power for the instruments to work.

"This is the Medical Bay to Engineering, I'm working on a patient here, I need power to the Medical Bay a top priority now!"

Parfet had her hands full as she took the call.

"I wish I could accommodate you thereâ€|but we're having problems by the bucket load down here as well! I can't do a single thing until I find a way to read the men's language!"

"Hmmmâ€|"

With that thought in mind, Duero then turned to faced Buzam.

"I can go there and help them interpret the information, the sooner we know what's wrong with this ship, the better off we all are, and I can finish the examination of the patient once power has been restored to the Medical Bay."

Buzam smiled a bit at the young man and replied.

"By all means, but be sure to come backâ€|you do have a patient to tend to."

-----

In the Engineering Bayâ€|

The moment Duero stepped into the Engineering area, the reaction to his presence was simple.

"It's a man!" One of the engineers under Parfait screamed as she caught sight of the young Tarak doctor as she was moving to help Parfet with translating the Tarak language encoded information from the Navi-robot.

Parfet simply glanced at Duero and nodded her approval of his arrival, since this was the language of the men on Tarak, who better could read it than a man of Tarak?

"Oh, you're here. Good."

She then led the doctor over to the worktable where the little Navi-Robot was hooked up to one of the consoles.

"I can't do much with all this data if I can't read it."

"It's just a Hi-type #6 data feed."

Duero replied as he examined the data being shown on the Navi-Robot's screen. He was rather curious about the little setup the engineer had going on. "What exactly were you trying to do here with the robot anyway?"

Parfet began to explain with a little sheepishness to the young physician that the Navi-Robot and the ship's reactor somehow seemed to be linked together. She had thought that the robot would make a

good sensor. However, with the language of the men in front of her, she couldn't figure out the reason for the ship's current condition.

Duero nodded as he looked a bit more at the data. "According to this readout, there seems to be a massive built-up of impurities, probably from the merging of the two ships."

"Maybe, so can you fix it?" Parfet asked as she gazed at the young medic.

"I'm sorry to say this, but I'm a doctor, I'm no engineer."

This made Parfet a little bit mildly irritated. "That's no excuse! Everything that moves is alive! It's a doctor's duty to fix all living things, right? That's what I always believe in!"

Duero's curiosity was peaked as he gazed at the feisty female engineer before him.

"You have a very interesting view of things." He replied as he removed his trench coat. The ship then once more shook hard as the ship now entered the nebula.

-----

As soon as the vessel's lower section immersed itself into the nebula's outer gas ring, the engines went on full shutdown. The ship was now propelled by pure momentum now.

"Engines have now shut down, captain." Amarone reported as she was able to still access the condition of the ship's engines despite having no access to the controls of said engines herself.

Magno sighed as she was now being cooled by an ice pack over her head and a portable fan was nearby as well. "Just when I get the good news that we've stopped, we now are in a nebula of all the places." It was then that the fan near her shut down as well.

"Captain! Sensors indicate that another section of the ship is now transforming again." Belvedere reported as she began detecting massive energy fluctuations on the arms of the still fused ships.

Outside of the ship's hull, near the arm areas of the ship, new crystal formations appeared as the ship once more went into a transformation phase.

Cortana then noted the very same thing happening to the fused Forward Unto Dawn section as she tried to access what was happening to the UNSC Frigate, though the data was still very much scrambled, the ship section appeared to have not suffered any harmful changesâ€|in fact, it seemed that the crystals were once more upgrading the ship even further.

"I'm picking up massive changes to the section of the Dawn as wellâ€|I can't make out what it is, but most of the core systems seem relatively intact and usableâ€|I'll keep trying to find out what is happening."

-----  
"Curious." Duero commented as he checked the data being displayed through the Navi-robot's screen. "It seems that the ship is reacting to the gaseous composition of the nebula's outer ring and seemingly absorbing portions of it into the system core."

Parfet considered the data for a moment then smacked her fist into her open palm. "That's it! The ship must be trying to use the gases in the nebula to neutralize the impurities inside its systems!"

Duero nodded as he was in full agreement to the engineer's answer. "It seems that the ship is reacting like a living thing. If that's the case we'll need to find a solution to the problem soon."

-----  
Back at the wreckage

Dita looked through her binoculars. "All I can see Ms. Gasco are the markers." She reported back as soon as she looked through and spotted the buoys deployed under BC's order.

"Something must have happened then." Gascogne thought about the change of events for a few moments, and spoke. "Well, we're already finished here. So we'd better get back to the ship now."

"Roger."

They both activated their thrusters and moved out but just as the two women were now making their way back to Dita's Dread, the ship's supposedly destroyed systems came back online.

The sensors detected the presence of Dita and Gascogne and when they were least expecting it, the sensors ordered the trap to be sprung. The supposedly destroyed ship then deployed massive metallic tendrils that moved like snakes aiming to snare one of the female pirates, which happened to be none other than the chief supply officer Gascogne who was behind Dita.

Before the older woman knew it, she was now the proverbial fly trapped in the spider's web as the tendrils surrounded her in a metallic cage.

"Ms. Gasco, look out!" Dita cried as she saw the tendrils capture her comrade but was a little late in delivering the warning.

-----  
Back at the pirate vessel

The ship seemed to be coated by some sort of the crystalline shell and in a few more minutes, the shell cracked and portions were flung away as the ship took on a very different look and tone as well.

"Captain, I have an idea." Buzam called in as she got into contact with the bridge and to her commanding officer through the active communication systems. She was currently in the sub-bridge of the former Ikazuchi colony ship.

"Go ahead BC." Magno sighed as she continued to try her best to remain cool despite the sweltering heat, which indicated that the temperature had just hit a few extra degrees in the bridge.

"Since the Dread launching platforms are offline, we can't launch any of the Dreads to retrieve Gascogne and Dita. Howeverâ€¦"

"However?" Magno inquired as she tried to shift to a more comfortable position on the command chair.

"However the Vanguard launching platforms are still operational. It's a potentially high risk, but we could have that young man go out and go look for them." BC spoke earnestly

"Hmmmâ€¦. Not a bad idea despite it's risk, BC. All right then. Explain the situation to him and see if he agrees to it."

"Thank you, Captain." But just as BC was about to sign off, Magno took a look at the second in command's location.

"By the way, BC. What are you doing in the men's section of the ship?"

BC gave a slight smile. "Justâ€¦ fulfilling my duty as your first mate, Captain. Over."

-----

At the alien wreckageâ€¦

"It's no use, Ms. Gasco!" Dita cried as her latest attempt at freeing her comrade failed.

At this point the older female and the pirates' chief supply officer was more concerned about her current predicament than reminding the young Dread pilot that her name was Gascogne. The metallic cage that trapped her was well designed and kept her from escaping. Dita had attempted to use the built-in blasters of her suit, but the metallic tendrils were too dense for the lasers to cut through.

"Well this is comfortableâ€¦I should have known that whoever these aliens are, they were not the kind to leave something behind just in case we got curiousâ€¦I really screwed this mission bad."

Dita then got an idea. "Hold on Miss Gasco. I'll get the tools from the Dread!"

Gascogne shook her head in disagreement at that. "Don't bother with that now Dita. Have you forgotten our mission here? Someone has to go to the ship with that data in that disk! You take your Dread and head back to the ship!"

Dita looked horrified at that and shook her head. "Ms. Gasco! I can't just leave you here like this!"

"Who said anything about you leaving me here to rot anyway? This isn't some third-rate soap opera! You can come back for me with more help, right? Now hurry up Dita and get going!"

Dita nodded reluctantly as she knew that Gascogne was right, she turned around and headed for her waiting interceptor.

However, the moment she was out of sight, the insides of the ship reactivated itself again. Panels all over the section of the wrecked vessel opened revealing more of the alien fighters and several smaller types, which could be repair drones of some sort. Gascogne immediately began to have this sinking feeling behind her spine.

"Looks like I'm not going to be alone today."

-----

In the cellâ€|

"Damn itâ€|it's so hot in here!"

Hibiki was currently wearing only his loin cloth style briefs with a weird smiling face that had sharp teeth in the mouth in the center of the flap. He had been forced to strip down to the odd clothes due to the heat, while the Spartan was still dressed in his pants and boots, and tank top, not minding the heat, the Tarak teen wondered how could the Spartan seem not to care about the oppressive heat, but decided not to find out. He then thought back of the time he had been asleepâ€|

He saw himself in the field of blue-green light and asking the strange voices as to what was it they wanted from him, what was that strange robot he had been piloting along with the redhead Megele girl and he asked just what was the plan the voices had in mindâ€|however he was struck by several energy bolts and screamed in surpriseâ€|to find himself remembering his Grand Pa, the man who had raised him when he was youngâ€|

He had always wondered why his Grand Pa tilled the vast wastelands of Tarak with his hoe day in and day out. He admitted that it no doubt kept him in good physical shape for his age, but there was nothing to be grown on the barren landscapes. He then recalled the house he had stayed in, the windmill moving in the breezeâ€|and the windows. He then recalled his Grand Pa who had been sitting outside of the house on a crate looking at the sun and then facing him and calling his attention.

"Hibikiâ€|"

"Grand Pa?"

"I want you to go the city Hibiki."

The old man said as he was on the door way of their house on the outskirts of the vast Capital City of Tarak.

"Why?"

"In order to know yourselfâ€|"

"I already know enough about myself."

"No you don't."

Grand Pa then tossed a Third Class Citizen ID card to the floor to him as he stared back at the old man with a confused look.

"Friends are like mirrors, you can see you're reflection in them, go there and meet some people, make some friendsâ€¦so you can learn more about yourself."

Hibiki looked at the ID card and that was the last he ever saw his Grand Pa as he made his way into the City a few hours later.

"Grand Paâ€¦"

Hibiki then recalled how shocked he was when he found none other than Duero placing his face on his foreheadâ€¦he managed to move the Tarak male out of the way in a panic and demanded just what was Duero trying to do. Duero told him that he was checking his temperature. He told the doctor that he was fine and nothing was wrong with himâ€¦that was when Duero said that he was indeed fineâ€¦but he was mumbling in his sleep about Grand Pa, and he was curious as to who this person was. Hibiki told him that Grand Pa was Grand Pa, not anyone special and was the one who had raised him when he was still little.

Duero found that peculiar, as he found it hard to believe that a member of the First Generation would have contact with Third Class Citizen such as him. It was then that he was asked by Buzam to accompany them for something important.

The Spartan seemed to be very silent, almost brooding, so he decided to leave the Spartan alone for the time being.

John himself didn't like the heat, but paid it no mind, this heat was nothing compared to the many things he faced when he was young up to now. He was more concerned about what he recalled ever since the day they all had fled from the Ark and the newly constructed Halo Ring. It was hard to imagine what had happened ever since then.

He was in a whole new dimension for unknown reasons, Cortana had somehow been turned into a human being right before his eyes, he faced a brand new alien force, and was now in a literal gender war between men and women. He had a feeling that he was going to be in for a very long trip. He had observed Hibiki and wondered why was it he seemed to have this connection to the strange boy.

Hibiki wasn't from the UNSC, and he was certainly not a Spartanâ€¦not that he wanted Hibiki to go through the procedures, but there was something about the lad that seemed to get his attention, not in a strange way, but the Spartan had a feeling that this boy had something, a secret of some sort or another, and somehowâ€¦something in him told him to keep the boy safe until that secret was revealed, it was somewhat the same when he had been assigned to protect and guard Cortana years back.

"My my, what an interesting outfit that is, don't you have any shame?" Buzam said as she looked to see Hibiki lying on the floor,

she made no comments towards the Spartan as he was still very much dressed up.

Hibiki looked at Buzam and sighed with a glare.

"Let me guess, it's my turn to do something for you, right?"

"Quite the contrary actually, I came here to ask you a favor."

Hibiki looked suspiciously at Buzam, wondering just what the female officer had in mind, with John looking back her as well, curious as to what favor the female officer had in mind.

"There's not much time left, and considering things as they are, I'll be honest with you, we left two crew members behind on a mission to gather information about those alien forces we fought with before. I would like you to help us get them back."

/Hmmmâ€|rescue mission.\

The Spartan noted that very quickly and wondered just what Hibiki was going to say, would he agree with the favor being asked of him or not. The words Dr. Catherine told him about saving all lives as best he could made sense as they were still in unknown lands and surrounded by hostile forces, they needed everyone to be on their stations and alive to make it through.

However, Hibiki didn't seem to share the sentiment the Spartan did as he snorted and looked away from Buzam.

"Give me one good reason why I should care about helping you?"

Buzam glared at Hibiki's words and replied.

"Now is not the time to be thinking about the war between men and women or fighting with each other, you saw that unknown enemy, their forcesâ€|and their units that have tried to board us. I had figured that you were willing to help us since you were able to beat them before."

Hibiki looked back at her with a slight glare, but before Buzam could say anything, John answered.

"He's going nowâ€|and I am coming with him."

Hibiki looked at the Spartan shocked at his words and defiant, but John looked back at him with a blank and emotionless stare, making Hibiki pause in what he was about to say.

"We are in the middle of unknown territory, we have an unknown foe that will not hesitate to kill us all on sight, and we don't have much time Hibiki. This is not the time to think about this pointless war between you're people and Buzam's, it's a waste of you're time and hers, we help them, and they help usâ€|is that clear?"

Hibiki sighed a bit as he decided to follow John.

"Fine, I'll do it, but I'm not revealing anything more to her, she had better not be threatening me again!"



Buzam looked at Hibiki with a smirk at that remark as she deactivated the laser bars of the cell.

"Was I threatening you? I hardly think soâ€¦I was merely stating facts, and it is the rule on Tarak for the strong to help the weak and those in need after all."

Hibiki snorted as he changed clothes as the Spartan merely walked over to the youth and spoke.

"That was no threat but a favor, and now, something of an order, you don't have to like itâ€¦but you have to do it."

The Spartan then faced Buzam and made some inquiries to the silver haired woman.

"Where's my Mark VI?"

"It's in the Engineering Bay, you can pick that up anytime you wish, just make sure to tell Parfait you're the owner. Anything else?"

"Is Cortana on the bridge?"

"Yes, you can contact her now if you like."

-----

In the bridgeâ€¦

Magno looked at the screen to find the Spartan looking at them all and Cortana as well. She wondered what the Spartan wanted and she decided to ask him what was it he needed from them at this momentâ€¦though she decided to call him by his rank in the military so as to make it seem more appropriate for a soldier like him

"What is itâ€¦Master Chief?"

"I want to accompany Hibiki on the rescue mission ma'am."

"Hmmmâ€¦I don't see what's wrong with the request, so you may do so, anything else?"

"I need to get my Armor back and I need to speak to Cortana as well, is she there on the bridge?"

Cortana smiled at John as she turned about to face the image of her chosen guardian and friend for many years of her existence then as an AI, to now.

"I'm right here John, what do you need?"

"Do we have any ships needed to fly out from the Hanger Bay?"

"Yesâ€¦we have some of the Longsword Fighters ready, along with a few Pelican drop-ships, and the Hanger Bay is ready to send them out."

"Have one of the Longsword Fighters readyâ€¦plus I might need to

access our munitions storesâ€|do we have any FURY TAC weapons left on the ship's stores?"

"Quite an amount John, though we never got to use them on the Ark, how many do you need anyway?"

"Just one will do."

"Got itâ€|the FURY and the Longsword will be ready at the Hanger Bay as soon as you are done. Good luckâ€|and try not to get killed, okay big guy?"

There was a bare hint of a smile on his face as John replied.

"Don't worry."

The women were confused as to what a FURY TAC weapon was, but neither John nor Cortana gave any proper explanations to their question on what the weapon was. But that also told them that it must be very dangerous indeed. The Spartan then gave Hibiki orders to head for his Vanguard as he made his way to the Engineering Bay to pick up his Mark VI.

It didn't take very long for the pair to leave the area, with the Spartan now in his Mark VI and in a UNSC owned Longsword Fighter, and the Tarak teen in his Vanguard. When he had arrived in the Engineering Bay the engineers, even Parfait were somewhat stunned to see him enter their section, but he wasted little time and told Parfait that he needed his Mark VI back, and the head engineer allowed him to take it. John offered his thanks and made his way to the Hanger bay on the UNSC section and sure enough, the things he needed were now there, he then grabbed a M90 Shotgun and a pair of M7 SMGs, with full ammunition, and the weapon he had asked from Cortana. Once he got word that Hibiki was now out, he launched the Longsword Fighter

-----

Back at the nebulaâ€|

"Sensors have detected a massive object, which has a direct collision path with us. It appears to be an asteroid-sized chunk of ice." Amarone reported to Magno as her sensors confirmed the object heading for the ship.

"Did you hear that? Do something now!"

Magno cried out to Bart who was still in the navigation well.

However, Bart was in the middle of a hysterical screaming fit as he also spotted the incoming asteroid, and was now of no help to anyone whatsoever.

"He really needs to have a backbone."

Cortana said as she pinched the bridge of her nose as she listened to the shouting of the Tarak youth, while the rest of the still present bridge crew were in agreement with the former UNSC Ai who was now in her AI form once more.

-----

In the Engineering section, at the mean timeâ€|

"The input/output ratio is off. If we don't do something now, the pressure will destroy currently link routes we are using."

Duero remarked as he checked the readouts in front of him. Through using the screen display of the Navi-robot.

"That's because there aren't enough link routes to handle the strain!" Parfait declared at her own end of her monitor.

"But the existing ones can't handle the strain on their own. Any more pressure and changes on the links and there's going to be no way to fix the Paeksis and the ship!"

"Don't give up yet! There HAS to be an answer!"

The physician thought for several moments, considering the situation they were in, then he decided to approach this situation the way Parfait viewed and thought of it. If it really was behaving like a living organism, then perhaps his training in medicine and his doctoring skills would apply.

"How about a bypass then? In medicine, when there is a blocked artery, then all you have to do is make an alternate route to clear the path and relieve congestion."

Parfait nodded, as she understood what Duero had in mind. "A detour huh? Great idea doctor!"

She reached him and patted her hand on his left shoulder in agreement.

"You knowâ€| you wouldn't make a bad engineer!"

She turned and directed her attention to her staff and began giving new orders.

"Listen up, everybody! We're going to get busy!"

Duero on the other hand, looked down at his shoulder and contemplated Parfait's touch and why she touched him.

-----

Back at the wreckâ€|

Gascogne looked in morbid fascination and amazement as she witnessed the alien fighters and the smaller drones begin their repairs on their mother-ship with clean-cut efficiency, which confirmed her suspicions that the so called alien vessel was actually a massive mobile factory.

"They can repair and function even under these conditions and this much damage?" The head supply officer remarked.

It was then she caught movement through the corner of her eye, she

turned and saw something very large and rather ominous heading for her direction. The machine looked like some massive bug, with a massive array of clawed appendages, and two large soulless eyes focusing solely on her. She had a very accurate idea that this machine wasn't here to have a civilized conversation with her.

The head supplier laughed nervously as she focused her own gaze at the massive sized mechanized bug as she said.

"I guess I know what you want for dinner."

-----

Out in deep spaceâ€¦

"AAAAAAHHHHHHHH! NO!"

Dita cried out as she was now running for her life, as several enemy fighters were chasing her and taking pot shots at her Dread. She used every evasive maneuver she had learned from her fellow Dread pilots and her comrade and leader Meia, and any other maneuver she could think of at the moment. But the alien fighters remained behind her and had no intention of letting the young redhead escape.

"I REALLY HATE ALIENS WHO DON'T KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP!"

It was at this point that her ship's sensors warned her of another approaching blip heading for her.

"From the front too?!" Dita asked in growing panic.

At that instant, one of the fighters pursuing her managed to hit near her Dread, the fighter rocked by that near miss, making accidentally activate her ship's weapons and firing them. Twin beams of destruction lanced forward and caused a small explosion some distance away from her as soon as they struck their target.

However, as soon as the explosion faded, several barrages of missiles were suddenly launched back. The missiles however, passed over Dita's Dread without hitting the fighter and turned her pursuers into scrap metal. It was at this moment that Dita was close enough to spot who were in front of her. One appeared to be some sort of massive fighter craft that was not the same as her Dread, and next to it was a machine she was quick to recognize.

Hibiki was not in a good mood, as he got into contact with Dita's Dread. He was already making his way to where the women were when he was hit by weapons fireâ€¦thankfully, the weapons didn't seem to harm his buddy too much, but that still didn't mean he was happy at suddenly being shot at.

"HEY! IS THAT ANY WAY TO THANK THE PERSON WHO CAME OUT TO GET YOU OR WHAT?!"

He knew now that the redhead's weaponry didn't seem to harm his Vanguard's armor, but even so it still ticked him off that he was shot at by the person he was looking for.

Dita however became overjoyed at seeing Hibiki. "Mr. Alien! You came for me!" She then made her Dread accelerate towards the

Vanguard.

"Hold on! Wait a minute here!" The young Vanguard pilot tried to activated his Vanguard's braking thrusters to decelerate, however since he was still not used to flying a Vanguard, he didn't find the braking thruster controls in them, and as soon as his Vanguard and the Dread were in close proximity to one another, there came a bright flare of light. Vanguard and Dread once more became the VanDread.

"Wow! What is all this?" Dita asked in delight as she tried to gaze at everything she could see, as she now sat on Hibiki's lap in the cockpit of the massive mecha.

"Hey! Will you please stop moving around so much?"

Hibiki didn't like the way she was moving and squirming on his lap for one second, as her movements on his lap begun to make things hard for him to operate this mecha they were currently inâ€|not to mention that for some reason, the movements of the woman on his lap began to affect a certain part of his male anatomy, though why he had no idea.

The young Dread pilot smiled as she turned to face her Mr. Alien. "I just want you to know, that I believed that you would come, and I knew that you would rescue me."

Hibiki glared as Dita's face was at least half a foot away from his, and part of his natural male instincts were sending certain thoughts into his brain. He retorted angrily at the young woman as he was still not very happy with the idea of working with women all that much.

"I didn't come here to save you! Iâ€| just went out to look for youâ€| that's all."

"Well thank you." Dita said happily, though blissfully unaware of what her smile was doing to the young brown eyed Vanguard pilot.

It was then that they were receiving a call from the unknown fighter that had destroyed the alien fighters that had pursued Dita when she tried to get back to the ship to send the data back and get help for Gascogne. The two looked and Dita beamed at the sight that greeted them, it was the green armored and gold faced alien that she had met with Mr. Alien before, she didn't know that he could fly a fighter before.

"Mr. Green Alien! It's nice to see you!"

The Spartan merely shrugged his shoulders a bit and then asked the young woman the important question as to where the other crew member in her party was. He had been told just who the two crew members were and to find only one of them made him curious.

"Where's you're other comrade?"

-----

Back at the wreckageâ€|

Gascogne was definitely not liking her situation as it unfolded in front of her. The mechanized bug began to efficiently cut away the tendrils that held her. She knew that the machine was only doing so to get to her.

"You guys work pretty efficiently. I don't suppose I could make you consider working for us?"

Gascogne tried to sound confident which was a sharp contrast to the fear she was feeling as the automaton came closer to her.

The response of the machine was simply extend a wicked looking appendage with claws that looked VERY sharp.

By then the chief supply officer for the pirates was sweating.

"So, now I guess it's my turn now, eh?"

However, the automaton couldn't reach her with its surgical arm, as the thing was suddenly swallowed by something metallic and rather huge. It was instantly crushed into a mangled mess of parts as Gascogne looked out and saw the VanDread outside.

Gascogne sighed with relief, as she was now sure that Dita had brought in the cavalry.

"You guys put off saving me until the last possible moment, but I guess I couldn't have asked for a better stage ending."

That was when she spotted the movement of green metal and into the area walked or rather floated the Spartan. She was not expecting to see the UNSC Super Soldier with the rescue team of Dita and the young Tarak lad who no doubt was with the redhead. She then got to speak to the Spartan as John managed to get into her suit's communication systems.

"You all right?"

"Do I look all right to you?"

The Spartan shrugged and then used his Mark VI's amplified reactive metal liquid crystal layer and his own amplified strength to move aside the metal rods that held Gascogne—this made the others, including the trapped supply officer wonder in awe as the Spartan began to methodically rip aside the metal bars that held her prisoner.

/Whoa—he's strong!\

Hibiki thought as he saw the Spartan bend and tear open the bars as if it was nothing more than a routine thing for him to do. He then saw the Spartan do the same thing with the inner bars and did so without harming the woman or damaging her space suit.

/Wow! Mr. Green Alien is so strong! I wish I could be like him!!!\

Dita was in awe at how strong the green armored alien was as he was able to use only his hands to do what she could not with her suit's laser. She wondered if she could convince him to show her just how

she could be as strong as he was.

Gascogne, having been among those women who saw the utter carnage this man could do was not entirely surprised to see him bend and rip aside the bars holding her as if it was nothing but a routine thing for him to do, it was however SEEING it up close and personal as he methodically bent the bars of high density metal that made her very aware of just how strong he was—and since she couldn't see through the Mark VI's polarized golden visor, she had no idea what were the emotions on his face as he did this—she had no trouble seeing him being able to break and shatter bones as well. She calmed down as the Spartan managed to free her. He then began to circle around her, momentarily confusing her as she wondered what he was doing, until she realized that he was checking her space suit for damages.

The Spartan then spoke to her via comm.-link.

"Get outside, my Longsword Fighter's bay is open, get in and wait."

The Spartan then reached behind him and took out what appeared to be an oblong shaped object, an object that seemed to resemble an overinflated old Earth style football, but in dull metal grey and appeared to have some sort of time and access panel.

Gascogne looked at the thing and decided to ask her rescuer what it was.

"What is that thing?"

The Spartan began to type in the sequence and decided to tell the others what this weapon was that he was currently arming.

"This is a FURY Tactical Nuclear weapon, it has a low level yield of nuclear material, but has a blast range of at least 1.2 Km. Essentially, it's a nuclear grenade, standard UNSC issue weapon."

That got Gasco's attention very quickly, she had known about nuclear weapons, they were supposedly no longer in use, but the military of Megele were rumored to have some stockpiles of nuclear material for making nuclear weapons. She knew how destructive they were and to find out that this man could carry one on his back made her VERY nervous.

"Are you telling me that thing's a nuke?!"

"Yes, we use this to blow up bases and enemy ships, don't worry, it's pretty clean so no need to worry about radiation poisoning."

Without another word, the Spartan tossed the weapon into the area and it landed right into a crack in the wall, with that done, the Spartan placed his feet on a nearby wall of debris and pushed himself out and then dragged Gascogne with him, and headed straight for the open bay of the Longsword Fighter.

As soon as they were in, he sealed the bay and the two of them were now inside the cockpit and the group left the area—just as the FURY TAC nuke detonated and destroyed the rebuilding hulk of the alien ship for good as there was not enough time for the aliens to try and

disarm the weapon thanks to both it's size and the time of 45 seconds that the Spartan had logged into the firing system.

-----

Back at the pirate ship's engineering roomâ€|

"We've managed to secure at least thirty-six bypasses to the reactor and the main systems of the ship!" Parfet declared as she checked in through the monitor on her console. "How are things on your end, doctor?"

Duero sighed as he closed the Navi-robot's panel and faced his colleague. "I can't do any more back here I'm afraid to report. We'll just have to make due with what we have now."

Parfet knew that despite then newly installed bypasses, those were not enough. "The balance ratio will be completely thrown off if there aren't enough link routes!"

"Do you know what doctors do during a time like this and when in this kind of situation? We then believe in the patient's desire and will to live."

The female engineer smiled and nodded. She knew that they had done enough, now it was up to the Paeksis to take care of the rest.

-----

Outsideâ€|

The massive chunk of ice continued it's path of collision with the fused vessel as the crew frantically try to avoid disaster.

On the Command Bridge, Magno's mouth was in a tight straight line as her bridge team continued to report.

"Distance is now twelve hundred kilometers and closingâ€|" Amarone reported as she stayed at her station.

It looked like the end to Magno; however that was until the fan near her suddenly came back onlineâ€|

"Huh?" the pirate Captain could say in surprise.

Belvedere gave a cry of joy as she checked the readouts on her console. "The system just rebooted itself!"

Cortana likewise gave confirmation that she now has full control of the sections of the fused ship under her control and began to take over those said sections, but she still did not have the authority to override the Paeksis and take over the steering of the ship.

Down at the engineering section, the Navi-robot became active once more, stood up on its feet and smartly saluted both Duero and Parfet.

"Beep! I'm back in service!"



"Yes! We did it! We make a great team!"

Parfet whooped with joy as she reached out clasped Duero's hand in her own, then she looked down at both their hands for a moment and blushed as she gazed briefly at Duero.

Duero also felt rather odd, as he also found his gaze torn between his hand held in Parfet's own and her face.

-----

In the bridge

"HARD TO STARBOARD, THIRTY DEGREES!"

Magno shouted to Bart in the navigational well. Cortana quickly joined in and shouted at Bart as she contacted him in the Navigation well, unmindful of the fact that he was very much stripped down and naked.

"HURRY UP AND MOVE THE SHIP!!!!!"

"AAAAAHHHHH! IT'S TOO LATE!" Bart screamed in fear as he immediately braced himself for imminent destruction.

Then, there came a massive explosion in front of the vessel, but it wasn't the ice colliding with the ship's hull. Bart opened his eyes as he felt no pain at all, all he could see was that the asteroid was completely vaporized and in the thing's place was the VanDread flying in front of them.

"Hmph! So he saves the day once again!" Bart said with disdain.

That was when the Spartan appeared in the communication system and he replied to Bart.

"Which do you prefer being alive because he did or being dead because he didn't?"

-----

Inside the VanDread's cockpit

Man! I am SO tired! Hibiki sighed as he leaned back on the command chair.

"Wow! This is so amazing!" Dita said excitedly as she bounced up and down on Hibiki's lap, making the young pilot even more agitated and nervous, as she was bouncing once more on a certain part of his anatomy. Though considering his current state of exhaustion, he could do nothing but groan and wish that all this was over so he could get some sleep. He then managed to get enough strength to guide the VanDread towards the ship and make sure he didn't hit anything along the way.

In the Longsword Fighter, Gascogne was now bare of her suit and in her normal clothes as the Longsword maneuvered towards the open Hanger Bay. She then turned and faced the Spartan who was still on the controls, she had to admit that when looked at in a certain point

of viewâ€|the armored giant of a man wasâ€|interesting. She then put that aside as the fighter began to dock into the Hanger Bay.

As the fighter landed, and the bay door opened, she and the Spartan left the fighter and she then faced the tall warrior and gave him a smile.

"Thanks for the lift, I doubt it would have been comfortable if I rode with Dita and that kid in that machine of theirs."

"No problem ma'am."

"The name's not ma'am, and no matter what you hear the others call me, my name is Gascogneâ€|Gascogne Rheingau, not Gasco."

"I understand Gascogne."

With that the Spartan left the scene and went to place back his weapons in the Armory Station near the Hanger Bay, leaving the head of the Register to smile as he was the first person on the entire ship to call her by her full name of Gascogne. She then made her way to the Hanger Bay in the men's section of the Ikazuchi to make sure Dita still had the data they had been able to get from the ruins of the ship.

-----

In the Conference Roomâ€|

As Magno looked over at the information that Gascogne and Dita had been able to retrieve from the now obliterated ship. She decided that with what they have learnedâ€|

They a LOT of things to do in order to get back home.

She however already knew what to do with a certain pair of individuals, she then turned as Cortana and UNSC Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 entered the room, Cortana merely smiled at the elderly captain, but John, being a military man all his life saluted the woman. Magno didn't say anything as the Spartan was showing her respect in his own way, and with that in mind she saluted him back.

"You wanted to see us Captain?" Cortana asked.

"Yes, and it has to do with what I have to soon say to the others."

Magno then showed them the data and allowed both the woman and the Spartan to know what they were dealing with at this time and place. As she finished showing them the information, she spoke to Cortana.

"Cortanaâ€|you and John are not from this dimension, so technically, I have no right to keep you on this ship as prisoners. But seeing as we are facing an unknown force that will no doubt attack us again and again, the idea of leaving you two alone without support is not something I want to consider nor approve of. However, you both possess great talents and abilities that I don't want to waste at all. I have no doubt that those aliens might soon hunt you two as

well. So instead of keeping you here as prisoners, even if it is only in name, I want to offer you both a place as members of my crew. Officially, there will be no hiding it now as I plan to tell the others about your new status as members of this crew. I hope in your case Cortana, you can serve as the operations officer of whatever missions that are within the parameters of your current capacity and that of John as well. Is that all right with you?"

Cortana thought about it and nodded.

"Of course Captain Magno. I'll do what I can here."

"Thank you Cortana. And as for you Master Chief."

"Yes ma'am?"

"I want you to serve as our ship's Combat Specialist, you have the most battle field experience than any other member of my crew and also you possess remarkable fighting skills that are very powerful. I am including you in our roster not just for your skills though, you might be aware of this, but I want my crew to know you are on our side and not the enemy's. Once they know you are an ally, the less likely things can get rather messy around here on the ship. You helped protect us with the boarders that attacked the ship and that is why I want you to serve as our Combat Specialist when things of this nature happen. Is that all right with you?"

"Sounds all right to me ma'am."

Magno smiled and then had a thought as she looked at the two of them.

"And I would like to see your battle records as well. There might be many of the crew, that when they find out about your real origins, might consider it all lies, so if you have records to show them the truth, I would appreciate it if you will show the records to the crew."

The two looked at each other and Cortana asked the Captain.

"Are you sure about that Captain?"

"Positive."

Cortana sighed, she had copied ALL of the John's battles with the Covenant, the Flood, and the Covenant Loyalists from the Mjolnir and could still access the files in her AI form, though it was somewhat against her nature to reveal the records. The situation as it stood, plus the fact that they were in a universe where neither UNSC, the Covenant Separatists, the Flood, the Forerunners, or even the Halo Rings didn't exist meant that all the files were very much redundant to hide. She then gave Magno a small smile.

"I'll start compiling the information and the records Captain. But it will take me quite a while to get all the data sorted out."

"That's all right. Until then, I'll see you both later. Dismissed."

Both Cortana and John saluted her and left the Conference Roomâ€|Magno then got the call from Buzam that the rest of the crew were now ready to listen to her announcement, along with her second in command informing her that Ezra was well enough to resume her duties and was being escorted back to the bridge by Duero. She sighed as she moved back to the bridge on her chair to being giving her speech to the crew.

Things were about to get even more lively in this ship once she gave her announcementâ€|that much she could be assured of.

-----

To be continuedâ€|

-----

#### Author's Notes:

This officially ends this chapter of VanDread â€" Halo and we now move on to the next chapter. If you're wondering why I somewhat shortened the ending, well, I have a special plan for the rest of the story as I do plan to have some changes to it in the coming time frame.

On the next chapter, I'll try to have a bit of change in the story, namely with the relationship between John and Cortana, along with his other interactions with the rest of the crew, and his new found obligation to keep an eye on Hibiki and keep him from getting killed.

In this case, we can expect Hibiki to get lessons about team-work, discipline, honor, combat, strategy, tactics, and more from the battle-hardened and decorated Spartan. John-117 might even serve as not just a protector to Hibiki but as a mentor and maybe even a father/brotherly figure to the young teenâ€|though John-117 will probably use UNSC Marine training and discipline to keep Hibiki from making a fool of himself if he gets over his head and acts all high and mighty like he does in the original series.

And the way the Spartan will correct Hibiki will be a lot more difficult than just forcing Hibiki to be scrubbing toilets and mopping floors in a dressâ€|that's for sure.

As to how the others will react to the news that the Spartan is now a member of their crew?

Here's a little trailer for you readers:

-----

Meia couldn't help but look with some surprise as she walked into the training room in the UNSC section of the ship. She had wondered just what the Spartan had said about leaving Hibiki to himâ€|ever since he had taken the boy after she and the Tarak youth had argued about his leaving the ship and engaging the enemy on his own without orders.

On the mat was Hibiki doing push-ups with weights on both his arms and legs, along with a vest on his body, no doubt with weights sewn into it as well. The boy was covered head to toe in sweat and all the while, the Spartan was watching him with a very blank stare wearing his Mark VI but without the helmet hiding his face.

"101! 102! 103! 104! 105! 106! Can I stop now?!"

Hibiki said with pants and gasps as he looked at the Spartan who was still in his Mjolnir Mark VI without the helmet.

"No."

"How many more do I have to do?!"

"At least 500 more! do that all in one hour, and I'll let you eat! if you don't finish all those push-ups in one hour! you're not going to have dinner. Period."

"You've got to be kidding?!"

"I'm not kidding. You've got one hour Hibiki, don't waste it."

John said with a blank and yet very serious expression on his face as Hibiki groaned and went on with the push-ups. Looking at what he was subjecting the cocky Tarak teen with made Meia think that maybe the punishment she had in mind for the Tarak youth wasn't going to be used after all.

-----

See you on Chapter 4 " Team Work!

## 5. Chapter 5

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: I have no ownership of either Halo and VanDread, they belong to their respective owners and creators.

### Chapter 4

#### Team Work

/ \: Thoughts

-----

"101, 102, 103, 104, 105!"

The UNSC Spartan was busy doing his usual routine of keeping fit in the gym area of the fused Frigate, and he wanted to keep himself in top condition for any possible threat to the ship. The weights he was using were already at their highest settings, namely at nearly 910 pounds. For most people it was a pretty high setting, but for him, it was nothing but a light workout.

While he continued with his exercises, he thought back on the

announcement that the Captain had made at least a day before to the rest of the crew. The women were naturally surprised with her announcement that the men were now to be part of the ship's crew, along with him and Cortana—he knew for a fact that not everyone on the ship would be very happy with the changes and additions to the crew, for now however, there was nothing for him to deal with so he might as well keep himself busy with keeping his skills razor sharp.

As he continued to push the heavy weights up and down, he then recalled his latest position as the ship's combat specialist and also to serve as part of the ship's security force. His actions in dealing with the alien forces that boarded the ship made it rather obvious why he was to be part of it. However, he decided to stay in the UNSC section of the fused ship for the time being to have some privacy for himself, not to mention this would help in keeping the women he had to work with a bit at ease until he was fully accepted into their ranks.

In truth, there were also female UNSC Marines and he had worked with them in more than one occasion, and since the UNSC Marine Corps, like the rest of the UNSC Armed Forces was a co-gender outfit, it was not surprising to see men and women working closely together. However, since the women of Megele had grown up without any contact with men, and viewing them as the enemy no less, he decided to let them get used to his presence on their own time.

As he reached the number of 300 repetitions, he then got off the bench and went to where Cortana was going to meet up with him. She had been assigned to the Bridge and the Register—the first was naturally as the one who could interface with the second well to access the UNSC weapons and systems that had been fused with the Ikazuchi, and then on the second job, she would learn the process on how the women worked in order to keep the Dreads in top operational condition. He then grabbed his Mark VI and put on the armor. As he made his way through the corridors of the fused Frigate, he wondered just what the others were doing at this very moment.

-----

In one of the wash-rooms on the female ship—

Belvedere was currently placing on her usual application of make-up along with her comrade who was from the security teams, and ironically enough—she was the very same one that Hibiki had poked in the posterior with his finger. The blonde member of the bridge crew then began to tell her friend about the latest rumor surrounding men.

"Did you hear the latest rumor about men? It's said that they have some sort of weird tube stuck between their legs!"

"No way! Do you think it's some sort of antennae?!"

"You know—if that's really true, I wonder if it's hard for them to walk around?"

"That's so gross!!!"

"I know!"

"It must be very icky for them then!"

Unknown to the two of them however, they weren't the lonely ones in the wash-room as Dita perked her attention at the latest rumors about men, and the moment she found out about this latest rumor, she looked at herself, between her own legs and when she was assured that she did not have that very same appendage, she smiled to herself and decided to find out from her Mr. Alien if it was true about men like him.

-----

Unfortunately, Dita's way of finding out the truth behind the rumor wasn't veryâ€|well, subtleâ€|

-----

In another washroomâ€|

"AAAAARRRRRGGGGGGGHHHHHHH!!!"

Hibiki was in hysterics, and for good reason as a certain redhead was currently with him the toilet stall that he was currently using. He had just dropped his pants and was about to do the call of nature when Dita suddenly appeared and looked at himâ€|namely at a certain part of his body with shining, expectant eyes. He quickly got his pants back up and shouted at the young woman.

"GET OUT OF HERE!!!"

He grabbed her jacket by the collar and quickly hauled her out of the stall and to the outer hall, namely the wash-room where the men were given their own place to use, namely with Magno's orders. As soon as he was able to drop Dita outside of the room, he quickly shut the door and placed an electronic lock.

Dita turned around while still on the floor and called out to Hibiki in a pleading and questioning tone.

"But why can't I watch Mr. Alien?"

"HOW THE HECK AM I SUPPOSED TO GO WITH YOU WATCHING?!?!?!"

Dita sighed in disappointment as she realized that she was not going to get her chance to see if the rumor was true about men having tubes stuck between their legs.

"I was only curious."

"Curious about what?"

Dita turned in surprise and smiled in relief as she found herself looking back at Cortana. The former AI now human being was still in her normal garb and was busy taking a break touring the ship to get to know both the colony ship section and the Megele ship before she went to her duties in the Register and then to the bridge.

"I was trying to find out if the rumor about Mr. Alien was

true."

Cortana looked at the door behind Dita and couldn't help but smirk a bit at the fact that it was the wash-room for men, what was Dita doing there anyway? And what sort of rumor did she hear that made decide to try and peek into the men's wash-room.

"What sort of rumor are you talking about anyway Dita?"

"I heard that they had a sort of tube stuck between their legs, and I wanted to see if it was true and I wanted to see if Mr. Alien has that same tube stuck between his own legs."

Cortana was slightly confused about that, that is, until she put two and two together and realized just what the rumor was supposedly about, and the former AI couldn't help but smile and have a slight blush on her face. She didn't expect that the sixteen year old redhead was interested in male anatomy, namely THAT part of male anatomy, and what its functions were—namely when it dealt with the opposite sex.

The former AI was only familiar with some of the concepts of human anatomy and its functions, and had pretty much been unconcerned about it all as she was very much still an AI at the time—but now that she was fully human, she couldn't help but feel somewhat intrigued and embarrassed by the whole deal, as she was still getting used to being a full scale human being.

Dita then guessed that since Cortana worked with the Spartan, she might know about it and being the curious and inquisitive teen that she was, she quickly asked Cortana if she knew something about this so-called tube.

"Do you know if men have it Cortana?"

The former AI sighed a bit as she tried not to embarrass herself further as she blushed a bit more, she then answered the redhead with as much tact and delicacy as she could muster in her current state of mind.

"I know men have it, it's a very important part of their bodies if I were to recall."

That was when Dita threw a bombshell right on Cortana's head with the next question she had in mind when Cortana confirmed that men did have tubes stuck between their legs.

"Have you seen one?"

Cortana looked at Dita with absolute shock and embarrassment as her once light blush turned into a sea of crimson, she was trying her best to contain her sudden reaction and try not to further embarrass herself even further in front of the young woman, but she couldn't help herself as she continued to blush, she then realized that if she didn't answer Dita soon, the redhead going to ask yet another embarrassing question.

"Well—honestly Dita, I haven't really SEEN one myself. But I think it's better you don't try and find out too much about it—at least not yet anyway."



"What do you mean by that?" The redhead asked in a curious manner.

/Damnâ€|this girl's too inquisitive for her own good.\

Cortana then walked away as Dita followed her to the rest of the ship's sections and as they did so, she replied in answer to Dita's line of questioning.

"Let's just say that when the time is rightâ€|and you're really preparedâ€|then you'll find out what that tube is and what it does. And just for today Dita, I suggest you leave it at that. Now then, I've got some things to do so if you want to come with me, you'll have to be my guide then."

Dita smiled as she decided to accompany Cortana, she might have found a brand new friend in the former UNSC AI.

-----

Elsewhereâ€|

The Navi-robot who was now named Pyoro was currently jumping about making cheering noises as Parfet was standing on a hallway and speaking through a large bull-horn device to amplify her voice without being too loud.

"Excuse me, I'm sure that you would all agree with me that the Ikazuchi is a lousy name, so I'm currently compiling a list of names that have been submitted to me so we can choose the new name for the ship."

She then placed the device aside and spoke to none other than Jura and Barnette who had been rescued from their plight in the elevator once they had full control of the ship once more.

"And whoever wins by having the winning name for the ship will be guaranteed a year's worth of food certificates redeemable at the Trapeza!"

Jura was naturally surprised at the statement and showed it too.

"A year's worth! Are you serious Parfet?"

Barnette then noted one particular name in the screen of Pyoro just as the Navi-robot showed them the list of names that had already been placed in by the crew.

"What's this oneâ€| the Nirvanaâ€|that's rather corny name!"

Parfet then whispered in her comrade's ear.

"The Commander picked that name you know."

"How do you keep track of all the name suggestions anyway?"

Parfet grinned and replied as Pyoro still floated nearby.

"I've just have the others log their name choices into Pyoro here."

The two women were somewhat surprised and quickly made two and two together and realized that the name of Pyoro was meant for the Navi-robot before them.

"You named the Navi-robot Pyoro?"

"Miss Parfet gave me that name, isn't it a good name?"

Jura sighed and she gave her own contribution as she and Barnette began to leave, with Barnette inputting her friend's suggestion, with was Luxury Night, much to the confusion of the small robot as it tried to picture the idea.

The Spartan then came on the scene and looked at the Navi-robot and the head engineer, and he naturally decided to move on, names for ships were not his specialty anyway so why bother with such details? That was when he got an incoming call from the communications net to head for the Medical Bay under Duero's orders.

However, Parfait spotted him and quickly called the Spartan over, the UNSC Super Soldier then walked over to her, slightly surprised that unlike the others, the head engineer was not scared at his approach.

"Hello there Chief, do you know of any ship's names?"

"Mostly military names ma'am."

"I seeâ€|well, it doesn't matter right if it's a military name, I just need a good and cool name that we can give to the ship, if you know one, can you tell it to me now before you leave?"

The Spartan thought it over and decided to take on the name that came into his mind.

"Elysium."

"What does that mean?" Parfet and Pyoro asked.

"It's old Earth for Paradise if I recall it right."

With that the Spartan took his leave and headed for the Medical Bay.

-----

At the Medical Bayâ€|

Duero gazed in interest at the images he was viewing. "Peculiarâ€| this organ doesn't even exist in a man's physiology." He remarked as he further studied the computer displays showing the gestating baby within Ezra.

Ezra looked at the young medic and explained what they were viewing. "It's called a uterus."

"Hmmmâ€| a reproductive organâ€| most interesting."

Ezra rested on the bed comfortably, as she began to explain to Duero and Kyle what else they were looking at. "I wanted to have a baby, so I decided to carry the seed."

This made the young medic curious even more. "What's the seed?" Duero asked.

"It's when an ohma donates an egg and has it spliced with the genes of the fahma. Then it is implanted into the fahma's womb to be nurtured and to grow. Where I come from, anyone who wants to be a fahma can be one."

"Hmmmâ€¦. So that means I can become one?"

Ezra developed a rather large sweat drop as she tried to find a way to explain that particular fact to Duero.

"I doubt that would work out Doc."

The two of them turned as the Spartan came into the Medical Bay. He figured that Duero wanted him there for a medical check-up which was standard Tarak practice, even though he personally knew that he was in top physical form, the Spartan agreed that some routine medical check-ups would be very helpful in the long run

"What makes you say that John?"

"Wellâ€¦men were never meant to give birth to childrenâ€¦as far as I recall, only women do that. How are you feeling ma'am?"

Ezra was somewhat surprised as the massive Spartan addressed her in a very respectful manner, and she realized that he was asking as to her health, she then spoke in answer and decided to use the Spartan's first name to show that she respected him as well.

"I'm feeling fine John, a little tired but fine."

The Spartan nodded as he then went to a faraway bed and took off his helmet so as to begin removing his Mjolnir Mark VI, however, he made sure not to do it in front of a civilian, namely Ezra. He then wondered how the others had taken to the video records that Magno had requested. Cortana had to spend nearly a day and a half gathering all the information and records to present to the pirates and he naturally wondered on the results of the records being made public.

-----

(The records will include every battle he has ever fought in, namely in the games and novels, from Halo: Combat Evolved, to First Strike, to Halo 2, Halo: Uprising, and naturally, Halo 3, all of which, being that it's the Legendary ending of the third game that started this story will mean that in the videos, the settings will be in Legendary.)

The officers of the still unnamed ship watched in shock as the records of the Spartan's battles were now being shown to them all in the view screen. Cortana had managed to finish her compilation and had handed them the records that showed just what the Spartan had

been involved in for the past many years of his life and the records were very much extensive as they looked at it.

This was the very first time they were actually seeing alien species, namely the Sangheili, the Unggoy, the Kig-Yar, the Lekgolo, the Jiralhanae, the Yanme'e, and then the Flood. Buzam, Magno, and Gascogne watched as the Spartan and his human allies, both male and female face off with these foes in many battles for the past years of his life. From the Pillar of Autumn to the first Halo Ring leading to the final battle on the newly constructed Halo Ring on the edge of the Milky Way. Seeing the aliens that the Spartan had fought with showed to the women in the room that he was not someone to be pushed around and someone to be taken VERY seriously when the time came for combat to start. The sight of what the aliens could do to humans, namely the brutal and merciless Jiralhanae and the works of the Kig-Yar was somewhat disturbing and to know that he had killed just as many of these warriors made it very clear to them that he was not lying about him being from another world.

They watched the battles in the Pillar of Autumn and then the battles on the surface of Halo, and they were on the edge of their seats when they saw him lead the rescue of Captain Jacob Keyes in the ship known as the Truth and Reconciliation and the battles afterwards, namely when they attacked the Silent Cartographer and more. They were feeling rather queasy as they saw the Flood for the first time and they were stunned when he had detonated the Pillar of Autumn's fusion cores to destroy Halo and how close he had been to death when he rode that Warthog all the way to the fighter with the entire ship blowing up all around him.

As they watched the records highlighting every battle in space, and on Earth, namely the battle station Cairo, they were stunned out of their minds as they watched him open the airlock into deep space, grab the anti-matter bomb and fly into space aiming the bomb at what seemed to be the LARGEST ship they had ever seen, flying past a burning UNSC ship which if he didn't miss would have flash fried him, entering the ship with the bomb and only having moments to spare as the weapon was reactivated and the ship was consumed as he landed on the UNSC frigate the In Amber Clad.

They saw him fight in the African city of New Mombasa and destroying the Scarab. The battles they then saw on the next Halo Ring were unlike anything they had ever seen before, and when they watched him kill the Prophet, they were in awe at how he had managed to slay all the Honor Guards alone and unaided, even if he came close to death quite a number of times he still defied the impossible and killed the Prophet with his bare hands. They then watched as he escaped from the temple, but wind up in the tentacles of the Gravemind the leader of the Flood.

It took quite a bit of effort for the women to contain their lunches at the sight of the Flood's leader, just as it took a ton of effort for them not to throw up at the sight of the Flood Infection Forms doing their works on the various beings they infected, whether they were human or Covenant. They watched as he left Cortana behind who was still very much an AI at the time and pursued the Prophet of Truth.

They saw him in many battles afterwards with his new allies, the Covenant Separatists, namely the Battle of Voi, the Second Battle New

Mombasa, to the Ark, to his battle in the now infested High Clarity to rescue Cortana, and finally to Halo itself—and they were treated to the sight of him and the Arbiter moving at high speed on a collapsing ring all around them at once—there were so many close calls and massive amounts of explosions and energy weapons fire flying all over the place until they all arrived at the Forward Unto Dawn.

When they finally finished their study of the videos, they decided that it was better that the man would be given as much respect as they could give—because if he could survive fighting such creatures for nearly his entire life, then they doubted that anything they have ever encountered would compare to his own experiences.

"Well, it's official—that Spartan is someone I don't want to be enemies with."

Gascogne said as she sighed and thought about she had witnessed on the videos and what she had seen the Spartan do when he was in combat, all that made her even more convinced that they were very lucky that he was now on their side.

"For a moment before—I honestly doubted his story and his achievements, but now that I saw that all he had been doing was very much real, I have to agree with Gascogne, that Spartan is someone we cannot afford to have as an enemy—even the most elite of Megele's commandos would not last as long as he has in such battles with those kinds of foes, and for nearly three decades no less."

Buzam said as the recordings ended, it was then she decided to play the records of Duero's examinations on the Spartan when he was not in his Mjolnir Mark VI. The tests ranged from his reflexes, carrying strength, his ability to hit with his fists and feet, his ability to recall valuable information, his senses, and more.

The officers were stunned in the test where he was tested for how fast he could run, as the test began to gain in speed, the women were amazed to see him running to almost 60 KMPH on foot, any normal person would have suffered massive heart failure and collapse at such running speeds, but he seemed totally at ease with what he had just accomplished.

The tests that were on his senses and reflexes were incredible as his reaction time was not measure in minutes or seconds, but literally milliseconds as he caught a coin in midair at such a speed it would have been impossible, along with determining which side the coin was going to land on, and his ability to disassemble and reassemble a Tarak assault rifle, a UNSC rifle, and then a Megele laser rifle, and fire each weapon individually with amazing accuracy and power.

They also saw him with a special set of equipment that could measure the psi or pounds per square inch that a person could throw with a punch. The Spartan fired a few punches and the first punch, being the weakest was already 1001 psi, the second was slightly stronger and was at 1023 psi, the third punch was a lot stronger and was 1255 psi, the fourth punch was far stronger at the range of 2050 psi, the fifth punch was by far the second strongest and was at 2955 psi, and the sixth and final punch hit at about 3890 psi, enough to crack normal steel and to bend high density metals—which when further amplified by the Mjolnir Mark VI was a very terrifying number, which explained

to Gascogne how he was able to bend and rip those bars aside like they were nothing but soft metal bars. Even his kicking power was beyond anything they had seen as one blow had ripped apart the practice dummy like a scalpel, they didn't even want to guess what would happen if he had a combat knife with him.

The women were also impressed with the sheer synergy of his abilities and the augmentations working as one on the next tests, further telling them that they were lucky he was not their foe, even alone, this man could do some very serious damage to those he might meet, even if he was bare of his armor and weapons, the sheer amount of damage he could do with his arms and legs, plus his mental faculties and battle experience would make him someone not to be underestimated by anyone.

-----

Laterâ€¦in the message pod deployment bay of the still unnamed shipâ€¦

Buzam was busy working on the last of the message pods and typed in all the current information they had been able to gather concerning the unknown forces that they had encountered. The Captain had announced to the crew that the aliens seemed to have started a massive scale operation known as the 'Harvest' and the aliens' targets included both Tarak and Megele, while they were pirates and had no loyalty to Megele by most standards, they were not going to let some new force destroy their best 'customers'. But in order to make things work out, they had to integrate the men into their crew, this naturally made a large number of the women rather unhappy.

Things got even more interesting as the announcement came out that the Master Chief and Cortana were to be part of the crew as well. The women who had seen the utter carnage this one man could unleash on his foes were very uneasy about having to work with such a person, while the others who learned about him being placed as combat specialist and had not seen the carnage he was capable of thought that the man was not going to be a good fighter. They were also not very much at ease that Cortana was among their new crew membersâ€¦not that they had an axe to grind with the former AI, but they were not happy to know that a woman who was not from Megele was among their group.

For now however, things seemed a lot more peaceful than most could hope for and it seemed that while there was to be no doubt that tensions would be running high for a bit, the crew were more or less civil towards each other, and that was enough for now.

As Buzam finished loading the data cards and programming security protocols and coordinates to the pods, she then turned as she got a communicatÃ© from Magno while the old woman was still in the bridge.

"BC?"

"Yes Captain, the message pods are ready to be sent out."

"I seeâ€¦but why were there two message pods there BC?"

Buzam then indicated the second message pod that she was currently working as the first pod she had been working with was now ready to fired out from the firing tubes.

"This second one is for Tarak Captain, considering that they too are under threat, they have to be informed of this crisis as well."

Magno thought it over and understood Buzam's plan, while the men were not their allies, they were not going to stand by and do nothing when it concerned the soon to arrive alien forces who were intent on conquering both worlds, as such, the men did need to be warned of what was to come before them.

"All right thenâ€¦do it."

"Yes Captain, launching the pods now."

Buzam pressed the release button and the pods were now launched, while the rest of the bridge crew were watching, just as Cortana arrived to see what was happening on the bridge, though she was aware of the fact that the pods that were deployed contained messages to both Tarak and Megele.

However, just as the message pods seemed to be in the clear, the location that they were heading to was suddenly lit up by a pair of explosions. Buzam gasped at the sight as a quartet of the same alien fighters appeared out of the explosions and headed right for them.

Cortana quickly reacted and entered the holo-tank and was now in her AI form, just as Magno made the call to alert all of her crew that they had incoming enemy forces to deal with right now.

"All hands prepare for battle!!!"

"Attention! All personnel! This is not a drill, Enemy contacts have been sighted! All pilots to their machines!"

Cortana also made it clear that the announcement was no joke and it had results, just as the enemy forces began to attack the ship.

John-117 had just finished giving his blood sample to the Tarak doctor as he heard the sirens and the calls to action by both Cortana and Magno, he wasted little time and placed back on his suit and took his helmet and put it on, he then got into contact with Cortana on the bridge.

"Boarding craft?"

"Negative John, appears to be just their space fighters, the Dreads should beâ€¦wait a minuteâ€¦I'm picking up a signal from a lone Vanguard, Hibiki's launched already! He's going to engage the enemy right now!"

"He's going to do what?!"

Meia was stunned when the ship had been attacked as she and several member of the bridge crew were on a coffee break. She quickly met up

with Jura and the two of them made their way to where their Dreads were stored, however, when they got there, the Dread Squadron leader was surprised to see Dita standing there doing nothing.

"Dita? What are you doing just standing here? Board you're Dread!"

Dita turned and spoke as to why she was very much still there on the floor and not in her Dread.

"It's just that Mr. Alien is already out there, whoosh! He was so fast!"

The redhead even did a pirouette spin to prove her point, and that got a look of dissatisfaction from Meia and a look of surprise from Jura as well.

"What? He's out there already?"

-----

Out in spaceâ€|

The Vanguard that had been transformed by the Paeksis and owned by Hibiki was already streaking forward with the energy sword already in hand and heading straight for the four fighters that were on their attack vector, the four alien fighters that the pirates dubbed as Cube Fighters due to their method of containment and transportations then directed their attention towards the Vanguard.

Inside his Vanguard's cockpit, Hibiki was in an all time high as he wanted to finally face his foes and show the women just what sort of man was he.

"You guys are in so much trouble, because Hibiki is here!!!!"

The Vanguard pilot used his Vanguard's sword to cut down the first of the Cube Fighters, slashing the alien fighter in half before it could retaliate. Two of the fighters began firing their weapons at the Vanguard but Hibiki was able to guide his Vanguard away from the attacking forces and take out yet another fighter.

As soon as the second fighter was destroyed by the Vanguard and it's young pilot, the other two fighters closed the gap and crashed hard into the Vanguard, covering it in explosions and debris. As the ship approached the wreckage, the elderly woman and the rest of the bridge crew looked on and spotted the Vanguard relatively intact and sitting on space as if being smug. Hibiki then contacted the ship and was very much wearing a smug look on his face, much to the dislike of some of the women on the bridge namely Magno, who looked at the young man without batting a smile.

Hibiki then went on to say how lucky they were that he was around and that they needed his help more than ever, considering how capable he was with his Vanguard and he was laughing the whole time, making Magno sigh and roll her eyes.

"Cheeky little guy isn't he?"

Cortana remarked was some measure of amusement as she shook her



head.

However, another person who was not very happy with Hibiki's words and antics was a certain UNSC Spartan who looked at the image of the young Vanguard pilot with his posture saying that he was not in a very patient mood with Hibiki's actions.

-----

In the Hanger Bay

As soon as Hibiki entered the Hanger Bay, he was greeted by the arrival of the Dread pilots, namely Dita, Jura, Barnette, and most of all Meia. As he opened his cockpit he looked to spot Meia glaring at him and Dita apparently looking at her leader with some degree of worry.

"You must be here to thank me for taking care of things out there, right?"

Meia glared even more and showed her dislike for his antics.

"Don't act so conceited and self important! You could have gotten yourself killed, going out there alone, you are only to act with my direct orders."

Hibiki then leaped down and looked Meia right in the eye with a smile of arrogant smugness on his face as he walked over towards her.

"Don't make me laugh! how do you expect to beat the enemy if you let a little danger bother you? you don't have to bother about that, you have me now to protect you."

Hibiki's actions of flexing his arm muscles did not endear Meia to him, in fact it just made her even more angry with him. She gritted her teeth and snorted.

"Small dogs always bark the loudest, and you are the loudest one of the whole litter."

Hibiki was surprised and stunned at the description and he glared right back at the fiery aqua-haired Dread leader.

"Hmph, that might be true, but that is far better than not being able to bark at all."

"Except you're not the one barking at all! it's just that Vanguard of yours right? You don't even have your bark at all, you probably don't even have the teeth to go with them?"

Hibiki glared and responded with his own anger.

"Are you looking for trouble from me?!"

"What's the matter? Can't handle the truth?"

"Who in the name of the Deserts died and made you the king of me?! Who do you think you are?!"

"YOU are still our prisoner on this ship."

"Oh yeah?! In case you're eyes and ears aren't working, this prisoner saved you're rear ends, just like on the first time we fought those things the first time we met themâ€|or did that fact just happen to fly out of you're memory?!"

Dita was in panic as she watched the whole exchange go underway and she could only hope that things won't get out of hand.

And just as it was about to get out of handâ€|

"Hibiki!"

The people in the Hanger Bay turned to see none other than the Spartan walking over to them, he may not have any of his weapons on hand at this moment, but that certainly didn't mean that he was going into the area without any form of protection.

Hibiki had expected that the Spartanâ€|being a man like him would take his side and shut the Dread Squadron pilot upâ€|he was more than capable of that, that much the hot headed Tarak teen knew and had seen already. The massive giant could easily beat the woman before him and she couldn't do much against someone like him, he could easily show this woman her place!

Meia likewise was tense, having seen how capable the Spartan was in combat when she had been there to the section which had the most carnage of their first encounter with the aliens, she had great pride in her abilities, but she had her own doubts on how she might fare with the Spartan Super Soldier.

However, much to the two people's respective surprise, the Spartan sided with neither of them but glared at the two of them instead and he seemed to be staring at the both of them with very calculating looks, as if determining just who among them he was going to deal with.

The Spartan then glared at Hibiki, his displeasure very evident in his voice as he spoke.

"What were you doing out there by yourself?"

"I was protecting the ship!!!"

"Really? Or were you trying to impress and show off?"

Hibiki was surprised and was not very happy with the suddenly unexpected talking down to by the Spartan towards him, despite seeing how capable the Spartan was and what the man was capable of doing to those who were his enemies, the hot headed Tarak teen was not going to back down from him and he was willing to face the Spartan to prove that he did the right thing.

"I did what I needed to do damn it! They took too long to get ready for battleâ€|they're so slowâ€|"

"Excuse me?! You've got some nerve there shorty!" Meia said with a glare as the two of them looked at each other and began shouting at each other, ignoring the Spartan while Dita looked on and tried not

to look and hope that the two of them would calm down before they did something they would regret.

"Who are you calling shorty?!"

"Who do you think?!"

"Why youâ€¦listen I did what I had to do and I did it just fine! I don't need you're permission, nor to do I act on you're orders! I am a man after all! Why should I have to follow you're orders?!"

"You are a man, there's no doubts about that fact, but you are a member of this crew and as such you are to follow orders from those who are higher ranking officers!"

"Like you?"

"Yes, I am the one responsible for all combat missions on the ship, and since you are a pilot, even if it's a Vanguard you are under MY authority, therefore you have to follow MY orders."

"Like I careâ€¦!"

"ENOUGH!!!!!!"

The people in the Hanger Bay were frozen at the loud shout coming from the Spartan who continued to glare at both Meia and Hibiki. John-117 was not in a very calm mood, though he still remained focused on the tasks at hand. He knew that the two of them had valid arguments, Meia was the leader of the Dreads and as such was commander of all space borne operations on the ship, and he could tell that she had the skill and talent be where she wasâ€¦in hindsight, she reminded him of the female UNSC Marines he had worked with on occasionâ€¦

She namely reminded him slightly of Orbital Drop Shock Trooper Lieutenant Melissa McKay, though she had been considered KIA ever since the first Halo Ring's destruction. Thus she did have the rank and authority to be the one to call the shots on operations like ship defense. And following orders was the best way to keep oneself ready for whatever might suddenly change in the heat of combat.

However, he knew that taking the initiative was a welcomed trait among soldiers since the enemy would take advantage of those who stuck too tightly to protocol and cause considerable damage to the ship in question and while there were only four fighters, they would have done enough damage to warrant attention, not to mention the fact that from his point of view, they were a recon picket groupâ€¦the Covenant used such tactics before, to probe and test defenses, he had no doubt that before they were destroyed, those Cube Fighters had acquired enough combat data for their masters to come up with important strategies. In that regard Hibiki had taken a correct course of action, silencing the enemy before they could have transmitted more vital intelligence to the enemy.

What he did NOT approve of was Hibiki's recklessness in combat, going off to fight four opponents by himself and not going without any back-up, or proper information regarding the foes he was about to faceâ€¦granted it was just four of those Cube Fighters, but that to him was hardly an excuse to go off on your own without any proper

preparations. He knew enough that even the most determined soldiers needed support from any source in order to accomplish a mission, in war, the enemy didn't care if you were the elite or the raw recruit, you were still a target, and it only takes one thing to go wrong to end your life in one flash.

Hibiki had the talent and the raw skill, plus having built Vanguards in his youth made him familiar with their basic operations, giving him an advantage over the others, that much the Spartan already knew of ever since seeing him in combat.

However, Hibiki was not properly trained, he had no military training to begin with and thus he lacked the military discipline, experience, knowledge, and tactical skills in combat. He was brash, reckless, arrogant, and very much full of himself, a good combination in a competent team player and soldier on the right occasions, but a death sentence for beginners and a weak link in a team of soldiers. He knew that very well—having seen countless Marines die needlessly when they were still fresh and not fully trained and familiar with combat.

Learning along the way was fine on some cases, but with an unknown foe like the ones they were fighting, now was not the time for stupid heroics that could very well get you all killed. With that in mind, he looked at both of them and replied.

"You both go talk to the Captain, because later—I will have a conversation with her on this matter as well."

With that, the Spartan walked away, leaving the group alone, and wondering just what the Spartan going to say to the Captain.

-----

In one part of the ship, Parfet was greeting the others from the Register, the Cooking staff, and the Security personnel, and it was naturally on the topic of getting new names for the ship that they were flying. Currently the ship was on stand by mode and not moving around very much

-----

In the bridge—

As the two pilots were now talking to Magno, she could only look and try not to hide her amusement on the situation as Meia and Hibiki were talking back on forth, at least Meia, having been a member of the crew for some time was very respectful in front of her, while the young Tarak teen on the other hand was more of the kind of person who didn't seem to care that much about rank.

"Look, I already went out there to help you women, and I did it well enough, so could you at least be fair and at least listen to me when I ask for a favor, it's the least you could do."

"Captain, with all due respect, he is reckless and is a danger to this ship and to the morale of the crew!"

Bart likewise looked at the situation and sighed as he listened to

the trading of barbs back and forth between Hibiki and Meia, not to mention the Tarak teen's ways to trying to have Dita leave him alone and to get Meia away from him so he could do his job.

"Looks like being diplomatic is not his forte in the least."

The two glared at each other, and it was then that they all looked to see Cortana smiling and sure enough the Spartan came into the bridge as Belvedere and Amarone looked on. Magno turned on the arrival of the battle hardened Spartan and smiled a bit as the Spartan stood ram-rod straight and saluted her.

"Permission to speak ma'am?"

"Permission granted Master Chief, what is it you wanted to talk about?"

The Spartan wasted no time as he spoke to the elderly woman about what he intended to do with the situation that was brewing between Hibiki and Meia, the last thing he wanted to see was this situation getting out of hand and the aliens using the confusion to their advantage, and that was far worse than any shouting match that could start brewing between the two pilots with very different outlooks of the very same situation.

"I want to take Hibiki under my supervision for half of the duration on this voyage, this means that while he is under my command, he stays with me at the Frigate section of the ship. And when it's time for him, he can be under you're supervision and command. Does that sound fair enough?"

Meia glared at the Spartan, not liking the idea very much as she had planned to have the young Tarak teen placed into the Register under Gascogne's capable hands to he could learn what it meant to work in a team, however, she was careful around the Spartan having seen his abilities in slaying the alien soldiers that tried to invade the ship before—though she was among those who had not seen the Spartan's combat records, along with his test records and results, thus had no idea how skilled he truly was.

Hibiki grinned and decided that he might as well be with the Spartan, and he answered before the Captain did.

"Working with the Master Chief is a lot more preferable than working with the weirdo here, I'll pack up my gear and move in with him, see you ladies later!"

As soon as Hibiki was gone, Meia turned to glare once more at the Spartan and spoke.

"Just so you know—Spartan, the Captain still has the authority to override your decision to have him under you're care, and she still hasn't made her decision."

"I'm not questioning that ma'am. What is you're decision regarding my request Captain?"

Magno looked at the battle hardened Spartan and wonder just what the man was going to do with his young charge, he had to have a reason to ask this from her and it was high time she found out what exactly

that reasoning was.

"Before I give my decision, I want to know exactly why you requested that young one to be under you're for half of this journey, for someone like you, you have to have some sort of reason as to why you want toâ€¦baby-sit that youngster, so, care to tell me why?"

The Spartan nodded and spoke patiently as he explained as to why he requested permission to keep an eye on Hibiki.

"Hibiki Tokai has promise Captain, he has what it takes to be one of the best pilots in his time and he already has the raw talent and skill to become that."

Meia snorted but kept her peace.

"However, he does have his flaws, he is brash, headstrong, reckless, arrogant, he has too much emotion, and he does not think rationally in combat, and as you might have guessed, he lacks understanding of team work and unit cohesion. These are flaws that can be a hindrance to him when the time comes, and while he does have promise, he lacks the basic military training and discipline in order to be an effective soldier and pilot. Without any form of foundation, he will become a liability in combat, and that is something that the crew on this ship cannot afford, am I correct?"

Meia was surprised as she had expected the Spartan to side with the young Tarak teen, and so were the others, even Bart thought that the Spartan would side with Hibiki at this point and time. Magno herself was interested in what else the Spartan was going to say.

"That is trueâ€¦anything else?"

"He has what it takes and I am not going to let good talent like that go to waste, and letting him find out what else he's good at may just as well bring out those talents, wasting it will be a serious mistake, plus, his Vanguard's ability to fuse with the Dreads when the need comes to it gives us a certain tactical edge over our enemies, and I have no doubt that the force that attacked us was merely a recon team sent to probe our ship's defensive capabilities and responses, I've got no doubt that they've already sent their data to their masters, and they will be at work in coming up with a way to kill us more effectively. While we might be relaxing, the enemy is already coming up with a way to kill us, once we know what we need to do, then we can be better prepared."

Magno nodded as she could not argue with the logic in the Spartan's case and decided to allow him to go ahead with his plans to train the boy personally.

"Very well, he's under you're supervision for today, afterwards, he can be placed under the supervision of our head of the Register, Miss Gasco. You know who she is?"

"Miss Gascogne Rheingau? Yes, I know who she is, that's also a wise arrangement. Well, then, with you're permission ma'am, I would like to begin training Hibiki."

"You have my permission."

As soon as the Spartan, Meia looked at the pirate Captain with some degree of worry and surprise, she had allowed the Spartan to get the upper hand and that did not sit well with the young Dread pilot, she had planned to make sure that Hibiki would learn his lesson, but it seemed that the young man had escaped from her and under the Captain's permission no less!

"Captain, you can't expect things to go smoothly, even though that Spartan is not from our dimension, he is still a man, he might let that young one off the hook!"

"I understand you're concerns Meia, but Master Chief is a man of his word, if he says that he is going to teach Hibiki proper military discipline, then he will do itâ€|after all, he did go out of his way to keep a promise, am I right Cortana?"

The two turned to face the human sized AI and she smiled back, recalling the time she had been rescued by the Spartan in the infested hive of the Flood that was once the Covenant Holy City of High Clarity. In truth as she learned about it, they had every right to abandon her since she was nearly compromised by the Gravemind and she had nearly told the Gravemind everything it needed to know, but John came for her regardless and he did say that when he made a promise, he would keep it, no matter the odds.

"You're correct Captain, if he promises that he's going to discipline Hibiki, then it is a promise that he will keep no matter what. Besides, if the cheeky kid thinks he's going to have it lucky when he's under the Chief's supervisionâ€|he has no idea how wrong he is."

"Are you sure?" Meia asked pointedly.

Cortana's AI form disappeared and the holo-tank's hatch opened to send the former AI now human out and back to her human form complete with clothes, she had to report in with Gascogne's group at the Register and she could not be late as there was no need for her to be in the battle-zone for a while.

"When you have the time, why don't you find out for yourself?"

With that, Cortana bade Magno farewell and made her way to the Register, just as Magno barked to Bart to quit eavesdropping and get the ship on course, the blonde navigator sighed and once more went back to work, though he was very discontent about his current situation.

"They sure don't know how to respect people around here."

-----

In another part of the male shipâ€|

"AAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Parfet had gone off to explore the rest of the ship and had accidentally opened another unexplored section of the former colony ship/slash Tarak battle-ship and now found himself buried in a large amount of strange and brightly colored pills, she along with Pyoro

were buried under the stuff and as soon as she was able to look around as to what all this stuff was. Knowing that Pyoro had been among the men for all his life before she met him, she decided to ask the Navi-robot what these were.

"Pyoro, you've been with the men before right?"

"Yes I have, why do you ask Miss Parfet?"

"What is all this stuff?"

The Navi-robot managed to flip itself to face the head engineer as it had been buried upside down when the avalanche of pills fell on it and, as soon as it was upright, in a manner of speaking anyway, it answered the head engineer's question.

"This stuff as you mentioned is actually food pill rations that all men of Tarak consume."

Parfet looked at the pills with some form of surprise as she never expected the men would actually survive eating all these.

"Men only eat this stuff?"

"Yes, one pill is known to have enough vitamins, nutrients, and body minerals to ensure at least 300 hours worth of labor."

"Hmmmâ€¦| "

"Hey Parfet? Have you seen Mr. Alien?"

The two of them turned as they spotted none other than Dita Liebely, the head engineer already knew just who Dita was looking for and therefore decided to tell her what she had heard concerning the Tarak teen.

"I heard that he was supposed to be assigned in the Register system under Miss Gasco, but right now he's being assigned to work and train under that Spartan."

"He's training with Mr. Green Alien?"

That was when Dita spotted the rainbow of pills. And she was very much curious as to what these things were.

"What's this stuff?"

"This stuff are food pills from Tarak." Parfet said as she recalled Pyoro's description of the food pills.

The moment Dita heard that, she became excited and knelt down to the pills looking at them with curiosity and interest.

"This is alien food?!"

Before Parfet could try and reason with the redhead not to try eating it herself, Dita took one of the pills and took a bite of it and chewed. However, she grimaced at the taste of the pills and spat it out, sticking out her tongue in disgust.



"How was it Dita?" Parfet asked, hoping that her friend was all right.

"The aliens actually eat this tuff?!"

The Navi-robot then spoke.

"If you are referring to the Spartan named John-117, I don't think he eats these, considering that he is not from Tarak, but Hibiki does as this is the only source food in all of Tarak, or so I've heard."

With that in mind, the redhead realized that she just might have found a way to get closer and learn more about Mr. Alien. As she was about to leave, Parfet called out to her as the head engineer had forgotten momentarily that Dita was among the crew who's name contribution she hadn't gotten just yet.

"Wait Dita! We need a new name for the ship! And you haven't given you're contribution yet!"

Dita replied as she moved out of the room.

"How about Roswell?"

-----

In the Frigate sectionâ€|

Hibiki thought that since the Spartan was a man and he was on somewhat cordial terms with the UNSC Super Soldier, then he could get some slack in a sense.

He was mistakenâ€|

The moment he had entered the Forward Unto Dawn section of the still unnamed ship, he found himself meeting the Spartan who quickly told him to head to the newly completed living quarters and take a bunk and head to the training hall, because in less than ten minutesâ€|training was about to begin. And as soon as he was done with his things, he arrived at the training hall, the Spartan was there in his Mark VI and told Hibiki to begin running around the large hall for at least fifteen rounds, and with weights on his legs no less, the young man protested that he didn't agree to that, but the Spartan merely glared at him and he knew that at this point and timeâ€|he didn't have much in terms of choices as he began to run around the hall, which was very large, and all the while the Spartan was looking at him like a hawk after a rabbit for dinner.

The Spartan counted his rounds through the internal timer in his Mjolnir Mark VI and looked at Hibiki to determine his current running rates and to see just what he was capable of in training, namely in the basic UNSC Marine training regime. He made sure to have an electric baton on hand, but he would only use it if he had to, he was there to train and discipline Hibiki, not torture him.

Hibiki felt like he had been running a marathon for nearly six hours, which in truth was only 2/3 of what he was doing now as the Spartan continued to watch him and order him to his feet when he tried to

stop and get him back into action, that and the large baton he had in his hands made the Tarak teen move even more so it could end.

A few hours later, Hibiki felt like he was going to collapse as he finally completed the last round of running and as the Spartan gave him a nod, he fell on the mat and groaned as he felt fire flow in his muscles as they groaned out and ached, creating a painful symphony to his body. The Spartan looked on at Hibiki impassively as he walked over to him, his hearing picked up the boy's groans and his words.

"Oh manâ€¦I thought this was going to be simplerâ€¦!"

"Nothing is ever simple in warfare Hibiki."

The youth looked up to the Spartan looking down at him and he gulped as the Spartan offered his hand, unsure of what this meant, he reached out slowly and the Spartan then hauled him to his feet, the Spartan then turned and told the Tarak youth to get ready for the rest of the workout and the Tarak teen could only groan out as the Spartan indicated the weights in the training room. He was to lift at least 90 pounds of weight for over four hours. After which, his arms were aching and he was given yet another water break afterwards, but not enough time to rest.

Laterâ€¦

Meia arrived to the section where the Spartan was currently training Hibiki and she was intent on finding out just what sort of training the Spartan was giving the young man. Despite the fact that the Spartan was not from Tarak and not an enemy of theirs, she was still very wary of him, no doubt because of his abilities and the fact that he was a man who she was not going to trust easily.

She entered the training hall, as she had asked directions from Cortana who was currently in the Register, and sure enough she spotted the Spartan standing there, bare of his helmet. As she walked forward, she then spotted the Spartan bare of his helmet and before him was Hibiki doing push-ups and he was covered heavily in sweat, the young teen was having weights on his arms, legs, and a vest with sewn weights in them, despite being far from them, she could tell that the boy looked like he was going to pass out.

"102â€¦103â€¦104â€¦105â€¦106â€¦107! Can I stop now?!"

Hibiki looked at the Spartan who merely shook his head, the Tarak teen was so tired that he didn't register Meia's presence, while the Spartan ignored her presence as well, he was more focused on training Hibiki. Meia looked on with shock at how impassive the Spartan was as he replied.

"No."

Hibiki tried to summon the strength to complain to the Spartan, but his arms felt like lead and he merely stayed there on the floor.

"How many more do I have to do?!"

"At least 500 more, once you do that in one hour, then you can rest and eat, if you don't finish that in one hourâ€|you don't get dinner. Periodâ€|and you have to do it all over again."

Hibiki's eyes widened.

"You can't be serious!!!! You're being unreasonable!!?!?!?!?"

"I am serious, and I am reasonableâ€|I didn't say anything about you not having any water now did I? You've got one hour Hibiki, don't waste it."

Hibiki groaned and saw he had no choice in this matter and decided to get this over with and began to finish his push-ups, making Meia gulp at what she was looking at, and it made her consider that her punishment for Hibiki was nothing compared to this.

John-117 then turned and spotted Meia, acknowledging her presence with a slight nod, though with the same expressionless face.

"What brings you here Meia?"

Meia walked over to the Spartan and when she looked at the Spartan and was stunned as she had never seen him bare of the helmet. She was stunned at how pale he was, his skin was like white snow and that covered with his expressionless face and cool and focused eyes made him very intimidating to the young woman, that along with his height and armor made him someone to talk to respectfully. Meia gathered her words and spoke back to the Spartan, showing that she was not going to back down against him.

"I wanted to see if you were actually going to train him or let him go."

"And have you?"

Meia merely nodded silently and then replied.

"Just don't think that I'll trust you just yet, or himâ€|"

With that, the Dread Squadron Leader left the area, leaving John-117 alone with Hibiki as the Spartan looked on and waited for Hibiki to finish his exercises.

An hour laterâ€|

Hibiki collapsed as he finally completed the last push up and lay down on the mat, exhausted to the core and he felt so drained that he couldn't even move. The Spartan saw that and helped him to his feet and took him to a nearby bench that was near the wall and then gave the young man a drink, Hibiki drank the cooling water eagerly, having sweated himself to near exhaustion and he gasped for some breath, he barely glared at the Spartan who looked at him, and when he got enough of his stamina back, the Tarak teen glared at the Spartan.

"Are you trying to kill me?!"

"Noâ€|and you did well enoughâ€|for a raw recruit."

"What do you mean by that?!"

"What you've just doneâ€¦it's qualifications for UNSC Marines, basic entrance situations. And despite being a civilian, you did well enough."

Hibiki was surprised at that and looked at the Spartan and asked.

"Y...Youâ€¦you were testing me?"

The Spartan nodded and then began to tell him something important, something Hibiki needed to hear.

"You've got potential, I knew that from the start, but you are brash, reckless, and arrogant, those traits are the fastest way to die, that and you have no concept of working as a team, you may not like the women who you are with, but if you want to survive out there you have to work with others regardless of how you feel about them personally."

Hibiki snorted and replied.

"Why should I anyway? I bet you didn't have to work with women before!"

"You're wrong, there are female Spartans as well, and there were female Marines and officers in my universe, and they were as fierce and as skilled as the men were. I have several fellow Spartans who were female and they were the best of the best, and I have worked with them for years too."

Hibiki finished his drink and promptly reached for his pill rations and began to eat them, the Spartan looked at the pills and took one as well and ate it, he then swallowed itâ€¦not minding the lack of taste, but vowed that as soon as Hibiki was able to get back on his feet, he was going to get him to try real food, how did this young man grow up with such terrible rations was beyond him.

He then spotted Dita as she came in and she ran all the way up to Hibiki and smiled at him, the Tarak youth looked up and groaned at her arrival, he was still exhausted, and seeing the perky redhead made him more irritable than before.

"What is it this time?"

Dita smiled wider and offered him her newly made meal in a box, the Spartan knew what it was and allowed Dita to unwrap the clothe covering and she then opened the box, allowing Hibiki to see the contents. She then tossed away the pills and that made Hibiki even more agitated.

"Hey! That was my dinner!"

"You can try these Mr. Alien! They're much better than those horrible pills you have been eating for so long!"

Hibiki looked inside the lunch box to find rice, egg rolls, squid, and fish rolls, he was not sure what this all was, but he was not going to try it just yet, but he was so hungry and the smells seemed

to be very different from what he had smelled before. He then looked at Dita and wondered if she was going to give him poison, until the Spartan looked at the food with approval and spoke to him.

"It's all right Hibiki, you can eat that. Who knowsâ€|you might even like it."

Hibiki was still unsure about this, but he was very hungry, and the Spartan did say that it was all right, so he nodded sullenly and opened his mouth. Dita took this as her cue and took out a pair of chop-sticks and took some of the food and offered it to Hibiki who took it into his mouth and began to chew and after doing so a few times, he swallowed the foodâ€|expecting the worst. But that was not going to be the case.

As the tastes hit him, he smiled warmly and quickly looked at the food.

"What is this stuff?!"

"This is cooked food, we have this a lot on Megele, I made this for you Mr. Alien, do you like it?"

Hibiki wasted no time and took the lunch box and began to gobble up the food at a stellar rate and Dita looked on with approval, she then looked at the Spartan, and was surprised to see him without the helmet, and having such pale skin. However, she knew that the Spartan was a good alien and a friend and as such she was not frightened of him.

"Would you like me to make one for you too Mr. Green Alien?"

The Spartan shook his head as he knew that Hibiki needed good food more than he did, besides, the section of the ship that he was currently in had it's own kitchens and food supplies, plus there was a vast number of still stocked MREs on the ship and that was enough to keep the Spartan well supplied, so it was not needed for Dita to spend the time and effort to cook for him as well, but the gesture wasâ€|nice either way.

"There's no need for that, but thanks for the offer."

"Okay, but if you change you're mind Mr. Green Alien, just tell me, I'll make a great meal for you!"

Hibiki sighed as he finished the food and placed the container aside, and he leaned back on the wall to relax and let the newly consumed food.

"That was good!"

"Then say thank you."

"Huh?"

The Spartan then answered the question that Hibiki asked.

"When someone gives you something like that, it is considered a sign of respect and appreciation to say thank you, she made that meal for you with her own hands and put the time into making it, so if you

appreciate the food that she made for you, then you should say thank you to her."

Hibiki thought about it and decided that the food was nice and the redhead did deserve to be shown his appreciation for the mealâ€|though saying thank you to a woman was a bit hard for him, but with the Spartan asking him to do just that, he complied.

"T-Thank You for the food."

"You're very much welcome Mr. Alien!"

Hibiki growled slightly and replied.

"Please stop calling me Mr. Alien! My name is Hibiki! Hibiki Tokai!"

The Spartan put aside the discussion and spoke to Hibiki.

"I'll take you to the Medical Bay, considering the kind of training you have, you'll no doubt have too much muscle pain in you to move around with anyway. Come on."

With that, the Spartan helped Hibiki stand up and escorted him to the Medical bay and supported himâ€|more like carried him, due to the very obvious height difference between the two of them. The Spartan paid no mind to the surprised looks, and Hibiki was still too much in exhaustion to care about the comments anyway.

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|

"Owwâ€|he really gave me a hell of a workout, I still feel the achesâ€|"

Hibiki said as he was now in the Medical Bay. He had been brought there by the Spartan as he could not yet move due to the muscle pains he had, thus the Spartan decided to call in for Duero to expect him and the young pilot. Right now, the Spartan was outside and talking to Gascogne and Cortana about Hibiki being placed in the Register for his time under the supervision of the women.

Duero nodded as he placed special healing balms on Hibiki's body and even have him take some vitamins, glucose tablets, and some nutrient injections along with the pain killers, the Tarak teen winced at some of the injections, but didn't seem to mind too much as the pain as the pain killers made the pain in his limbs a lot more dull and less loud.

"Considering what I know of the Spartan's abilities and skills, I'd say that he was being gentle with you Hibiki."

Hibiki snorted.

"You call him making me run fifteen rounds with weights on my legs, lifting 90 pound weights for nearly four hours and doing 600 hundred push-ups for an hour, being gentle! No offense Duero but you really need to straighten out you're perceptions on what being gentle is. What makes you so sure that he was being gentle with me anyway?"

"I looked at his combat records then they were shown to me by the Captain and the Commander, plus I have records of the tests he was subjected to when he was without his armor, trust me when I say that he was being gentle on youâ€|let me show you then."

Hibiki watched the videos of the Master Chief as he went through all of his tests and he was in awe at just how skilled and gifted the Spartan was in all of those tests, and it seemed that he had truly the ability, skills, and experience to win all those awards that he was known to have won in his long career as a Spartan Super Soldier of his world. He then took a look at all the compiled combat records that Cortana had handed to the officers and was viewed by the Doctor.

To actually see these real aliens and their abilities, plus their combat prowess, and to know that the man who was training him had killed thousands of them by himself in every battle he had ever fought inâ€|and against death defying odds that would have made even the most fanatical Tarak soldier blubber on in terrorâ€|made Hibiki gulp loudly, along with seeing the Spartan fly out into space with a bomb to blow up the largest ship he had ever seen by himself and with only seconds to spare. As the records were finished playing, to say Hibiki was in awe of the Spartan would have been a vast understatement, and to know that he was among them made him shiver.

"I'll tell you one thing Hibiki, considering all that I've seen and the tests I have personally conducted on him, he is everything he said himself to be, I have no doubt that the Master Chief is more a warrior than any of us. If he is teaching you thingsâ€|you had better be listening to him, because you can really learn a lot from him."

Hibiki silently nodded, his respect for the Spartan had just taken a super sonic trip upwards, he really could learn a thing or two for the UNSC Super Soldier and he was going to do his absolute best to earn the Spartan's respect.

-----

A day and a half laterâ€|

John-117 nodded with slight satisfaction as Hibiki began to do his rounds on the training mat and seemed to be more at ease with his new regime of exercises as the young man did his laps with the weights on his legs. The young lad still had plenty of rough edges, namely with other members of the nearly all female crew, but he was beginning to be a lot more disciplined than before. Of course the Master Chief knew better than to expect Hibiki to change his personality over-night, but it was a good start after all.

The Spartan had been training the young man about combat strategy, military tactics, fire team discipline, maneuvers, combat intelligence and more, along with knowing the need to be focused on the task at hand and not to be distracted by emotional outbursts. While Cortana had joked at for the past few days, he had mellowed out a little bit, the Master Chief was still a stickler to military training and protocol and therefore told Hibiki that he must learn to keep his emotions guarded or else he ran the risk of getting

distracted and getting distracted in the battle-field was a death sentence. He also made sure to test Hibiki in terms of physical strength and noted that the young teen, while still not very strong, was able to hold his own and the Spartan was content with that.

As soon as they were both done, they made their way to the Register to begin their shift with Gascogne and her crew.

He had already made arrangements with Gascogne to have Hibiki work with the women under the condition, to at least be fair to the young man's sensibilities, he was not to wear a dress for the duration of his service, the Spartan himself offered to aid Hibiki in his duties when there were no important missions to take care of and no boarding actions were made by the aliens that they were against.

This was the original assignment that Meia had planned to put Hibiki in, namely in cleaning toilets and others, but the Spartan had better ideas, and that was to teach Hibiki the value of protocol in certain situations, so they were assigned to handle dangerous materials and the Spartan helped Hibiki move some serious ordinance, in order to show him that, and to show that you have to always know what you were getting involved in before dedicating yourself to the fight fully, and being responsible for whatever actions you make.

He also spent time with Cortana, helping her get used to being a human being, the things that he normally took for granted were totally foreign to the former AI and since she trusted him more than the others on the pirate crew, it fell upon him to help her adjust to being human, though he wondered if he had what it took to be human for her at times.

Unlike the others in this ship he had been bred for a life of warfare and conflict and there was not much free time for a Spartan like him, sure a few games with Dr. Catherine, Cortana's 'mother' were there as well, but a life outside of the battle-ground? He however decided not to question himself and stay true to who he was, here and now he was human, a proud human being and a Spartan Super Soldier and his last promise to his dying friend, Sergeant Major Avery J. Johnson was to never let Cortana go ever.

With that, he made sure to help her out as best she could and she was thankful for that, though he made sure to let her grow on her own, and that was a good move as Gascogne and Cortana were becoming friends while the former UNSC AI was working with the tough but strong head supplier, she, along with Cortana, also became somewhat like friends to the young Tarak youth under his care.

Gascogne had to admit, both men were very helpful around the Register, and sharing some stories with the former AI named Cortana were rather interesting as they chatted about many things that interested them both and while it was a bit odd for her to know that the young woman was a former AI program, it was nice to talk to someone and play cards with. Cortana proved to be a decent card player and while she was not the best one the head supplier had seen, she was good enough to be a good challenge.

Plus this allowed Gascogne to know more about the Spartan personally, since Cortana knew the Spartan more than any of them, having worked with him for such a long time, him being her protector and all. She also couldn't help but be amused at times of some of the stories that



Cortana told her about when she would tease the Spartan. But the tough Register head could tell that Cortana did have feelings for the tough male soldierâ€|which were not surprising as he had been protecting her for all his time in the military, and she had to give John-117 credit where credit was very much due, for daring to enter the literal belly of the beast to rescue Cortanaâ€|all because he made a promise to her that when he dealt with the Prophet of truth, he was going to find and rescue her.

She saw the records and she was in awe at how the Spartan had managed to fight his way through all those monsters in the former alien holy city and still be alive now on this same ship. No one on Megele had ever heard of a man willing to risk everything to save a woman, and while many would have considered it garbageâ€|the head supply officer would have bet all of her earnings that it would have made one hell of a soap opera on Megele.

While the teen complained from time to time, he was a bit more cooled due to the time he had spent under the care of the Spartan, and Gascogne appreciated that, despite Hibiki's mouth and still present attitude, he was willing to follow orders, even from her when she asked him to wipe the floors and scrub the toilets on occasion.

-----  
Meia was not very happy but had to admit that the choice of having Hibiki under the Spartan proved to be more helpful as the young teen seemed a bit moreâ€|mature than before, but that certainly didn't mean she was going to ask for any help from either him or the Spartan, she was a proud member of the pirates' and their Dread Squadrons, she was not going to ask for any help from them.

As the day before yesterday passed, the pirates had not faced any new attacking forces, merely skirmishes with small scouting parties, for now it seemed that the aliens were silent and were not going to attack the shipâ€|including on this very this very day as wellâ€|and she suspected that this would prove that the men were not needed in the battles of the pirates.

She had no idea just how wrong she was going to be at this very moment at this very momentâ€|

-----  
In the bridgeâ€|

Cortana was currently in the holo-tank on the bridge, doing her routine inspection of the ship's systems that she had control over, when she picked up a faint signal, she was curious what it was, but only for a moment as she determined that it was heading for an attack vector for the ship and from the way it was moving, this ship was very fast. She then tracked and isolated the transponder frequencyâ€|and it was that of the aliens.

"Captain! I have incoming contact coming right behind us, and from the looks of things' it's a single ship belonging to our alien guests!!!"

Belvedere and Amarone also confirmed it and they were already

tracking it's movements, the ship was moving very fast towards them and it seemed to be very much alone, there seemed to be no other form of support fighters behind itâ€|not like before.

"Hey young man, get moving and get to the bridge. We've got company!" Magno called to Bart via comm.-link.

"All right already! Geez, couldn't they be a little bit more polite? Not to mention a bit more respectful?"

Bart rushed all the way to the bridge and when he got into the bridge, he was tired from having to run from his quarters in the men's room, since the ship happened to be very large in size and design.

"Why does this ship have to be so huge?"

"I hope you can show us what you're skilled at young one."

Magno said with a smile.

"Fineâ€|I'll show you just what I am good atâ€|running away!"

As soon as Bart slid into the navigation well, he quickly began to do what he could to get the ship out of reach from the enemy that was following them, and he was more than ready to hit the pedal to the metal, so to speak.

"I'll take all of us to the very ends of the Universe if I have to."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that."

Cortana replied as she was able to keep track of the ship following them. However then noted that the ship that had been sighted was able to match and surpass their speed quite easily, almost in the same way Covenant Ships, even smaller ones could out pace and out run even the fastest ships in the UNSC Fleet, the ship was now ahead of them and getting into visual range.

"This guy's a fast one, there's no way I can use the MAC Guns on him Captain, he could very well evade the shots, considering the fact that he can outrun and out pace usâ€|just as the same way Covenant ships could outrun and outdistance UNSC ships."

"She's right Captain, the speed of the ship is not something to laugh at, even for it's size, the ship is very fast." Amarone reported as she also kept track of the ship as it came into visual range.

The ship appeared to be comprised completely of spheres and one central eye in the middle, a very odd looking ship, but sinister in it's own right. It was colored purple and there seemed to be crystalline veins underneath it and the eye seemed to be already in the process of scanning the ship and the pirates to gauge their actions.

"What are they up to this time?"

The ship used it's thrusters to try and move aside, but the new alien ship seemed to match their movements perfectly, every time the ship tried to move to either the right or the left, the alien ship

followed with precision, sending the pirates the message that there was to be no escape, they either fought with it and win, or lose and die.

"The alien ship is keeping a set distance between itself and us Captain, no matter where we move, it will follow us."

"This guy's not going to let us run Captain, we will have to fight it or else it will never let us leave."

Magno nodded.

"I guess there's no helping it now is there Cortana? All right then, Bart, keep on course! All Dread pilots, prepare for combat!!!"

-----

Dread's transformed Dread was now ready for take off, but the redhead was busy with other matters as she cradled her latest box lunch for Hibiki, ever since he had thanked her for the food she had given him nearly two days before, she was planning to offer him her latest treat and she wondered how well he was doing at this moment—so much so that it was only when Meia's voice filled her Dread cockpit that she stopped petting the bento.

"Where were you?!"

Dita looked and found herself looking at Meia who was not happy with the fact that the redhead was not paying attention.

"Yes? Is something wrong Meia?"

"This isn't some sort of play or a game Dita! Lives are at stake including yours—being late could mean the difference between life and death."

Dita couldn't help but feel saddened and gave a look of apology.

"I'm really sorry."

"We're going to try a formation attack on that alien ship, got that? And focus on the battle, there will be time for the other things later."

Dita gulped a bit and saluted the Dread leader.

"Roger!"

-----

The Register—

"All right! A battle!!! Time to kick some alien—.ack!"

"Just where do you think you're going? You happen to be a Stage Hand at the moment, and stage hands are not to going to be on stage with the actors."

Hibiki glared at Gascogne as she had grabbed him by the collar, while Cortana was already on her station and the Spartan was looking on.

The Register girls were already hard at work, filling out the incoming orders from the Dread pilots who were coming in to have their Dreads fully fueled and armed.

Barnette was among the pilots coming in and she already began to place in her order with the girls of the Register.

"Welcome to the Register!"

"Can I have the A Set?"

"The A set? Certainly, would you like to add some complimentary homing missiles to you're order?"

Barnette smiled a bit and answered.

"I don't want to make the ship too heavy, but why not? Add it on would you?"

Barnette left the Register and the Register girl that took her order bid her farewell and began to follow through with Barnette's order with smooth precision.

John-117 was impressed somewhat by the efficiency of the Register.

"You run a good system here Miss Gascogne."

"Why thank you Master Chief. Now then, now you know the job of a Stage hand, and since you're new around here, you can take a load off and sit down and watch how things work around her when we're already in combat."

With that said, she quickly placed Hibiki on the chair and activated restraints on him, the restraints held the young teen down and he was not very happy with what Gascogne had just done to him when he was not expecting it from her of all people.

"Hey?! What are you doing?!"

"Like I said, you're new around here so sit back and just watch how things work."

-----

Barnette's Dread was now being equipped with all the needed parts, including the set that Barnette had just ordered from the Register. As soon as everything was done, Barnette smiled as her Dread's CPU told her that everything was in good working order.

"Barnette here, I'm going out!"

As her Dread took off to the battle zone and out of the Dread Launching Platform, the Register girls bid her farewell.

Outside of the ship, the section of the former Megele cruiser opened up and out flew the other Dreads along with Barnette's to join up with the rest of the formation.

-----  
Hibiki was not happy with being stuck on the side lines, but the Spartan took the time to study the foe before them. He was not concerned with the looks, but what the unit was capable of doing in battle.

-----  
As the Dreads got into position, the alien ship seemed unconcerned with the new fighters and stood thereâ€|

Everyone in the bridge was looking as Amarone reported that the alien ship was holding it's position.

Cortana was not liking this situation at allâ€|a new alien fighter ship that looking it a massive bunch of sphere stuck together and yet it seemed to be doing nothing, this was not right. Something about this whole standoff was not looking good to the woman in her AI form.

That thing's just there, doing nothingâ€|if I'm not mistaken, it's either studying us still or daring us to make the first move.

In the Register, Hibiki was confused as to why that alien ship that had pursued them so hotly was now just standing there like a moron, something was off. The Spartan thought the very same thing as both Hibiki and Cortana did, though he saw things differently. The enemy already knew that their primary forces were Dreads and Hibiki's Vanguard, so why was it just staying there?

Unless it was LOOKING for something or someoneâ€|

-----  
As Meia checked and confirmed that the Dreads were all in formation and ready to attack, she was unaware that the alien ship's sensors had been scanning the Dreads, but not just any Dread or group of Dreads, but hers, Jura's, and Dita's as well!

As soon as the alien ship's CPU confirmed the presence of the three enhanced Vanguards it targeted them specifically, ignoring the other Dreads and began to make it's move towards the pirates, as it had already identified the main ship as a threat.

-----  
"The ship is starting to move!"

-----  
To the eyes of the pirates on the ship and on the Dreads, the spheres that dotted the outer hide of the alien ship began to rotate around and around for some reason, and suddenly moving spines appeared out from the center of the spheres, this surprised and frightened Dita somewhat. The spines then became jagged in different angles and

streams of energy were seen in the middle of those spines and made them glow and when that was over, it became apparent that the alien ship was ready to fight.

Jura was shocked as well at the sheer ugliness of the ship as she cringed in her cockpit.

"They've got to be kidding, a Sea Urchin?!"

"Are we seriously going to fight that thing?!"

Jura asked Meia as she spoke to the Dread leader, who still remained calm and composed despite the sight before her.

"Just calm down and focus Jura, All team leaders, check to make sure that all of you're team members are in formation. All teamsâ€¦ commence that attack now!"

"ROGER!!!"

That was the answer the Dread pilots were waiting for as they shot forward to engage the alien ship and take it out. The aliens ship also got ready to fight as the spines suddenly began to spin at irregular but high speed patterns. As several of the Dreads, including Barnette's own fired their missiles at the alien ship, the spines took the brunt of the attacks the missiles were rendered harmless as they exploded without even touching the main ship. Several Dreads, including Jura's own managed to make it through and they watched as the ship began to move.

"This is not good, those spines blocked our shots easilyâ€¦ how can we destroy let alone damage that thing if we can't get a lock on it?"

Jura asked as she watched several of the other Dread pilots try to fire their own missiles, but they too had the same results like before.

"Let's get Mr. Alien! He and his Vanguard can really help us out on this mess we're in!" Dita called in her communicator as she also managed to avoid the charging Sea Urchin like vessel.

"NO! WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU ABOUT RELYING ON OTHERS?"

"But he's a good alien, he can really help us out!" Dita countered as she dodged more shots from the enemy.

"WE DON'T NEED HIS HELP! HE'S A MAN AND OUR ENEMY! WE CAN HANDLE THIS ON OUR OWN!"

Meia gritted her teeth as she directed her fighter teams once more. I WON'T ask for anyone's help! Namely from that MAN! Meia mentally said furiously as she remembered Hibiki and his arrogant attitude towards her before.

Though Meia was confident of her skills and abilities and that of her fellow Dread pilotsâ€¦ she wasn't aware that she was breaking the most important rule in battle, and that wasâ€¦ 'Never let your pride override your better judgment'

-----  
In the Registerâ€|

"I guess I was right."

Gascogne turned to the Spartan and looked at him as he studied the alien ship as it continued to move about.

"What do you mean?"

"The aliens have merely been probing us, testing our reactions and the forces we have, now that they got enough data these past two days, they must have come up with a counter measure for the Dreads, and that counter measure is that thing."

John then brought up an image of the ship on a nearby tactical display screen as it continued to attack the pirate Dreads with a very unique style of combat.

"The spines when they are jagged can deflect missiles and render the Dreads powerless for two reasons, the missiles basically are you're first strike weapon and for a quick kill and those spines render them useless on any range as it's too dangerous to fire the missiles point blank, and the speed of the machine makes it hard to engage using only energy weapons, this means that the only way to take this foe out is to strike when it's spines are out of the wayâ€|and it has to be a very precise attack in order to finish this quickly."

Gascogne nodded at the Spartan's reasoning, and knew that no matter how many times they would reload their arsenals, as long as the machine could evade their beam weapons and render their missiles powerless to hit it, this fight would go on and eventually they would be in real trouble. The head supplier turned to get the report of her newest load of supplies when the ship was shaken hard as the alien ship attacked the ship directly as the Dreads were still powerless to stop it.

In the Navigation Well, Bart was shouting in pain as the damage on the ship was transferred to him as several large gashes appear on his right arm.

Cortana noted that and quickly informed the Captain that if they didn't find a way to deal with this threat, the machine would rip the ship to pieces and Bart along with it. Magno nodded in agreement as despite her lack of showing appreciation for Bart's efforts, she is in reality thankful as he is the only one who could maneuver the ship.

Hibiki still tried to struggle and shout for them to release him so he could help the Dreads take out the alien fighter before it took them all out, much to his surprise, the manacles that held him were suddenly released and he looked at Gascogne.

"Time for us to get a move on."

"Huh?"

Unknown to Hibiki, while he was having his shouting fits, the Register girls had been filling new orders from the Dread pilots to

re-arm and re-stock their supplies and munitions. The women were already working around the clock to get the supplies ready and they had just informed Gascogne that her new load of orders were ready to be sent out.

The Spartan nodded and beckoned Hibiki to follow, though the youth had no idea what was going on, he didn't hesitate to follow the Spartan's orders.

-----

In a few moments, a new ship entered the fray and it was the pirate's supply shuttle, the Dreki, the ship appeared to be heavily armored and capable of withstanding several close and long range attacks. As soon as the Dreki was in position over the battle-field and several of its operation arms went to work.

"All right girls, let's get all this done in time, 50 seconds flat!"

Several Dreads docked with the Dreki, namely Barnette's Dread, Jura's, Meia's, and Dita's as well. The tactical displays showed the silhouettes of the Dreads and they were being refilled. On the outside, the robotic arms of the Dreki were busy loading new power cells into the beam weapons of the Dreads, and new missiles were being loaded onto their hard points, inside each Dread, the women pilots were being patient.

"Look out!"

Hibiki cried out as the Sea Urchin ship attacked the Dreki, but the reinforced armor plating took the blows without damage, and he was impressed with how the women were able to keep under pressure and in combat such as this.

"So this is how the Stage hands work?"

"Now you know why the pilots never stand alone when they are on stage, if we stage hands are not around, things can fall apart quickly."

Gascogne nodded with a smile as the Dreads were now fully powered and re-supplied.

"It's all done now girls, go out there and give them hell!"

"I'm so full!" Dita cheered out as she and the others were now back into the fight with the alien ship.

Hibiki then noticed that there was one more hanger on the Dreki that was still loaded and he wondered what was in it for Gascogne not to give it to her fellow pirates.

"You've still got one more package in there."

"Yeah, I figured that you can use this better than the others so we can end this fight, good luck out there kid."

Hibiki was confused and quickly made two and two together and smiled in triumph as he could now finally fight with the enemy. However the



Spartan stopped him before he could leave.

"Hibiki, keep in radio contact with me at all times, I'll help you in this battle so follow my orders for this battle, do you understand?"

Hibiki nodded respectfully to the Spartan.

"I do Master Chief!"

"Good, get going."

As soon as Hibiki left the scene, the Spartan took a seat next to Gascogne and he began to run through the information at tactical displays. He then got into contact with the ship and called to Magno because he had a plan in mind, just in case things went wrong.

"Captain, I need access to the tactical communication frequencies of the Dreads, all of them."

"May I ask why Master Chief?" Magno asked.

"Just in case this fight drags on even further, we can't afford to waste munitions and parts, along with possible casualties, I need access to the communication frequencies so I can coordinate their operations with Hibiki's own movements out here in the battle field."

Magno nodded and turned to Cortana and typed in a command frequency to her and told the

Spartan that his request was now granted.

"You have permission, Cortana will be transmitting the frequency codes to you're Mark VI right now."

"The codes should be coming in now John, I hope you've got a plan."

The Spartan nodded and signaled that he now had the command frequencies of all the Dreads. And not too soon as Hibiki tried to engage the Space Urchin in close combat using his Vanguard's energy sword. The women were surprised to see the Vanguard in the battle-field, Dita was happy to see her Mr. Alien, while Meia was not in a good mood.

The Space Urchin then fired out it's spines as it evaded Hibiki's attacks, and Hibiki was stunned as he was hit by the suddenly released projectiles. He coughed out in surprise and glared at the Space Urchin as it evaded him.

"Damn it! you'll pay for that!!!"

He was then surprised when he noted that his Vanguard was not moving for some reason and then found that one of the spines that the alien ship had fired had managed to pierce his Vanguard's right rear thrusters.

"Crap!!! That alien bastard's hurt my partner! I'll!"

"Calm down Hibiki!"

The voice of Master Chief Spartan II John-117 filled his cockpit and the young man recalled his training about emotions in the battle-field with the Spartan, and he managed to rein in his temper.

"Give me you're status Hibiki, what's the damage on you're Vanguard?"

Hibiki ran through the diagnostics and swore once more and gritted his teeth a bit and replied.

"That spike penetrated my partner's right shoulder and has disabled my right thruster, the engines still work, but I can't move at all, I'll try and remove the thing somehow."

"Keep at that, I'll route you some support right now."

The Spartan then accessed the command frequencies that were downloaded by Cortana to his Mark VI by permission of Captain Magno. As soon as he was told my his neural interface that he could now talk to the Dreads in the battle field and their pilots, he wasted little time.

"Attention all Dread pilots, this is Spartan-117, do you read me, over?"

The women were stunned to now find themselves looking at the Spartan and hearing his voice, they had thought that they could only communicate with each other.

"How did you manage to access our communications?!" Meia shouted in irritation, that armored giant of a â€|a man had now just hacked into their Dread communications!!!

"With the authority of the Captainâ€|who's the closest among you to Hibiki's Vanguard right now?"

"I am Mr. Green Alien!!!"

Dita was happy to know that the green armored alien was now with them, and with Miss Gasco no less. The Spartan nodded as he recalled what were the capabilities of the VanDread the two formed when they fused together during the first battle with the aliens. It was a long shot, but if the Dreads could keep the alien ship covered, then the two could use the VanDread's overall fire power to take the alien ship out of the fight.

"Dita, I want you to combine with Hibiki's Vanguard and form that VanDread from beforeâ€|we might be able to use it's fire-power to even up the odds in this fight. The rest of the Dreads should cover you so you can finish the combination."

"All right!!!"

Dita wasted no time and made her way towards the still unmoving Vanguard, she was happy to finally get the chance to combine with Mr. Alien. Hibiki grumbled but decided that it was better than being

helpless this way when the enemy was about.

However the alien unit seemed to know the VanDread combination Dita's Dread and Hibiki's Vanguard could make and what it was capable of. The machine was not going to wait and quickly targeted the redhead's Dread intent on either crippling the fighter, or destroying it and as it got ready to fire it's spines, someone else got into the act.

"Dita! Look out!"

Meia's Dread came on the scene and managed to move Dita's Dread aside before the spines hit the redhead's interceptor, but at the same time, the spines hit Meia's Dread, sending her towards the area where Hibiki's Vanguard was, just when the teen was trying his best to get his Vanguard to move.

"There's NO WAY!" Meia cried out as she tried to get control of her Dread.

"I'll let this thing beat me!!!" Hibiki shouted as he finally managed to force the spine that was imbedded in his Vanguard's shoulder out and get his thrusters working once more.

The two machines were close enough and suddenly they were both covered in deep green-white light and became a brand new fighting unit. The Vanguard was placed in between the Dread and the Dread began to shift it's form very quickly, the Dread flipped it's form over and released a pair of appendages that resembled the talons of a predatory bird's. The fuselage extended further and was now resembling the head of a dragon like beast with tusks in the front and a shielding of the plate slid down to reveal it's eyes. The new VanDread opened it's claws and seemed to roar out it's completion.

-----

In the Dreki

"Well, that's new." The Spartan said with some surprise.

"What?!" Dita asked in absolute surprise.

"Did you just see that?!" Barnette asked in absolute surprise.

"It's so COOL!!!" Jura cooed with surprise as she admired the machine as she and the others were looking at a brand new Dragon type VanDread.

On the bridge, the crew, including the Captain, Buzam, and even Cortana were impressed by the sight.

"That guy certainly has some tricks up his sleeve." Bart commented, with some envy in his voice.

-----

In the VanDread's new cockpit

As soon as both pilots recovered from the blast of light, they tried

to get themselves into more comfortable positions, but they then found themselves in the most compromising of positions, with Hibiki's back on Meia's breasts and she was in a reclining position while Hibiki was in a hunched over position. The moment they saw each other, they began to start arguing once more.

"I DIDN'T WANT YOU'RE HELP AT ALL, SO GET THE HECK OUT OF THIS COCKPIT!!!!"

"EVEN IF I WANTED TO GET OUT OF THIS COCKPIT, WHERE DO YOU THINK AM I SUPPOSED TO GO?!"

Their arguing was cut short as they were shaken about as the alien ship took advantage of their feuding to attack them. As he felt the impacts, Hibiki recalled his lessons about team work and decided to put his issues with Meia aside and reached for the controls, and they responded in the very same fashion as they ones that he had with Dita in their own VanDread, he then faced Meia and spoke as patiently as he could.

"As much as I'd like to argue with you, we don't have the time and we have that alien ship to deal with, once we're done with him, then you and I can start our shouting match again."

Meia glared but knew the truth in Hibiki's words and put aside her issues with him and began to work the pedals and controls that she could reach on her side of the chair.

-----

The results were very much explosive as the VanDread that was once inactive came to life and began to chase the alien ship with a speed and acceleration that made all the other Dreads, including Dita's and Jura's look like a bunch of garden snails.

Barnette was stunned as she saw the speed and acceleration on her scanners.

"There's no way a normal Dread can handle that kind of speed and acceleration!!!"

"Wowâ€|now I'm really envious of Meia and Dita. They're both so lucky!" Jura said in a very wistful voice.

-----

The new VanDread (soon to be labeled VanDread Meia) was running circles all around the alien ship as it tried to escape the attacking unit and fired all of it's spines in the hopes of taking out the foe it was facing, however, the VanDread merely dodged the attacks was now in front of the alien ship.

Both pilots took this as their cue to strike as they both voiced out their anticipation.

"This is exactlyâ€|"

"â€|what I was waiting for!!!"

An aura of light appeared before the Dragon-like mecha and covered it

as it launched itself like a MAC round and smashed right through the alien ship now that it was bare of it's only form of armor, it collapsed inside and exploded into many different fragments. The once one sided battle against the pirates turned into a total victory for them.

In the VanDread's cockpit, both pilots were very much exhausted by their respective ordeals.

"Well, that is one mess I don't ever want to happen again." Hibiki sighed.

"I didn't know that we were thinking the same thingâ€|now I guess you now know you can't just charge in expect to win every battle with just you're Vanguard, don't you?" Meia said to him.

Hibiki looked and replied. "That might be trueâ€|but you all were not getting very far with just your Dreads as wellâ€|so I guess we're both even."

Meia didn't reply at that since Hibiki, despite his bad qualities, did raise a point.

Outside, as the Dreads, the Dreki, and the VanDread returned back to the ship, Dita was not happy.

"It's so unfair, Mr. Alien's only supposed to combine with me."

Jura was deep in thought and then realized that since her Dread was transformed like Meia and Jura's Dread, then that would mean that her Dread could do the very things as well, and that was a very interesting thought to the blonde woman.

Laterâ€|

Hibiki was once more eating another box lunch that Dita had given him and he then noted the look she was giving him as he ate the food.

"What is it?"

"Will you promise to combine only with me Mr. Alien?"

"My name is not Mr. Alien! It's Hibiki, Hibiki Tokaiâ€|and thank you for the food."

Parfet watched as Buzam once more released a pair of message pods, but this time, to make sure that those were not intercepted by the enemy, they used the transponder systems of the destroyed alien ship to disguise the pods and make it easier for them to avoid being found and destroyed.

She only wished that they make it back and they were not ignored by the people they were meant for, and Buzam agreed with her as well. They could do what they could hope that things worked out.

Meia on the other hand planned to finally have a chat with a certain Spartan about his tapping into their Dread communication frequencies, she might have admitted that he did well, but there was no way she was going to let that happen once more on her

watch.

-----

To be continuedâ€|

Author's notes:

How is the action so far?

I have been suffering some strong body pains lately and I haven't got as much time as I normally have, but I am still going at this story with all that I've got so I hope you readers don't mind the mess that's here at the very moment.

And it seems that there will be some animosity between Meia and the Master Chief as the young woman is a proud fighter and will not stand by and be showed up, so what will be the response of the Spartan to the challenge?

We will be moving up the ramp on the story soon and as you all might recall from the original series, the next episode was on a desert worldâ€|and what happened there was where they had a full idea of the Harvest operation. And you all know that this was the first Vanguard mission in the series, and the only time the women piloted Vanguards.

But for VanDread Haloâ€|we are going old school hereâ€|because we are going to see the Master Chief kicking the rear ends of his enemies on solid ground! And this is where the women get to have some practical idea on just how nasty the Master Chief is when it comes to a fire fight!!!!

And like before, we have a trailer!!

-----

Jura and Barnette could only cover their eyes as the massive Sand Vanguards closed in and attackedâ€|but suddenly they heard a whooping sound and several powerful explosions, finding themselves very much alive, they looked to see their Sand constructed adversaries headless as they fell apart.

Dita and Hibiki noted that as well and looked to their rightâ€|

To see the Spartan carrying a massive pod in his hands and it was smoking.

The Spartan then turned and spotted several new foes heading at his directionâ€|but there were human shaped and he wasted little time as he placed aside the Missile Pod and took out his newest toy courtesy of Cortana's use of the newly acquired data specs and the manufacturing sections of the Nirvana and got ready as the humanoid Sand beings came right at him.

-----

See you on Chapter 5 The Sand Box!

## 6. Chapter 6

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: How many times have I done this? Ah well, VanDread is the property of Gonzo, and Halo is the property of Bungie. I own neither and I am only using them to make story.

### Chapter 5

Sand Box

/ \: Thoughts

-----

In the newly named ship, the Nirvana

The crew members were very much busy with the day to day operations of the Nirvana and were very much taking it easy for a change, however, they were now over what appeared to be some sort of desert planet. As of right now, most of the bridge crew were busy getting whatever information they could manage to acquire on the desert world.

Right now, the two top officers of the pirates were getting ready to discuss the crew's recent findings on the planet.

-----

Buzam and Magno were currently looking over the images of the newly located desert planet as more data was coming in from the rest of the bridge crew.

"This planet" Buzam began as she and the elderly woman looked at the images being shown to them.

"I know BC it looks as if it's dead something happened here all right."

"You're right, but something that could cause a world to be like this? It's very strange indeed with you're permission Captain, I would like us to find out what happened here, there just might be some sort of valuable information that we can get once we're on the surface."

Magno sighed and looked at the planet and then to her second in command, who happened to be the most efficient officer she had on her roster to date.

"BC, I'm not entirely worried about you going down there, since you're very capable in your own right, but I'm more worried about the others."

Buzam nodded at the Captain's worries as the two of them looked at the barren world, something had happened here and though it was strange, the second in command had a feeling that they were going to find out just what that thing was one way or the other.

-----  
In the Frigate sectionâ€|

BLAM!!!!

Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 looked at the target he had just hit with the SRS99D-S2 AM Rifle as the vapor trail faded out of sight. The Spartan was still wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI and was currently working out on his sniping skills on a lying position with the rifle in front of him. He looked through the scope of the Sniper Rifle once more to see a clean hit, though a little bit off for his taste.

As he placed his sights back on the scope after making the adjustments to his aim after the first shot, he began to look through it once more and track his next target and when he spotted it, he focused himself and fired out another round.

The APFSDS short spear shaped round, which was inspired by the Russian made 14.5 x 114 bullet used in HMGs and Sniper weapons, made from a mix of super dense depleted uranium and covered in a strong skin of titanium flew through the air as it discarded the sabot in mid flight and smashed right into the target, which was a humanoid shaped dummy following the design profile of the foes he had dealt with before. The round cut deeply into the head of the target dummy, between the chin and neck and blew the head clean off the target. He then stood up and took out the spent magazine and pulled the bolt back and loaded a fresh magazine and got the weapon ready as he moved to another sniper position in the weapons practice yard of the ship, as soon as he got there, he took a crouching position and got ready to shoot once more.

The SRS99D-S2 AM Rifle was one of the most powerful sniper rifles the UNSC had in it's arsenal, and was well know to slice through body armor and flesh with frightening power. He had taken out a large number of Elites with precision shots with the older variants of this weapon, and this version had more than enough power to stop even a Brute with a torso shot, and even if the Brute was still standing, the creature was stopped long enough for a second round to be fired, of course, the first round would have sliced through the Brute's body and into another Brute's body and killed the Grunt which would be behind the first two. This weapon did have a recoil dampening piston and that helped somewhat with the recoil this weapon had. This was standard issue for all UNSC soldiers who were trained snipers. If he was not in the front lines, Sergeant Major Avery J. Johnson, before he died was seen wielding a Sniper Rifle.

(APFSDS stands for Armor Piercing Fin-Stabilized Discarding Sabot)

The Master Chief also knew that he was among the most skilled users of the Sniper Rifle, though he knew that he was not the best, the best of the best among his fellow Spartan kin was Linda-058, his lone wolf female friend was the finest sharpshooter in the teams during the 27 years they had been fighting the Covenant, he remembered at one battle she had fired her weapon so fast, he had no idea just who she was shooting at first, the only thing that told him that she had done her duty was the number of dead Elites and Grunts that all had



Sniper wounds to their bodies. He and Fred admitted that she made sniping into an art form. And he and his other Spartans agreed unanimously that Linda was their finest sniper.

The two of them worked together on their first mission on Eridanus Secundus when he and the others were to capture Colonel Robert Watts, leader of the Eridanus Rebels, she had been there as well on Jericho VII when they fought the Covenant, and she was there also on Sigma Octanus IV, she and her fellow team-members evacuated 20 civilian survivors before his team used a HAVOK Nuclear Warhead to kill the tens of thousands of Covenant in the city.

In the Battle of Reach, he, Linda, and James were sent to Reach Station Gamma to destroy the unsecured and undeleted NAV database on the UNSC ONI Prowler Circumference as it was against the Cole Protocol, he lost James in that mission and while they had defeat the Covenant forces there, including Elites and Jackal Rangers, and complete the mission, along with rescuing then Sergeant Johnson's squad, Linda had been hit with so many overcharged Plasma bolts from the enemy's Plasma Pistols and Plasma Rifles, that they were able to bypass the shields and armor plating of the Mark V she wore and burned through her flesh, all the way to the carbonized bones of her body, one bolt hit her on the back of her skull and he thought she was dead.

He had taken her to the Pillar of Autumn and placed her in cryo-sleep until they arrived at the first Halo Ring, he knew that as per UNSC protocol and procedure, her cryo-pod was jettisoned when the ship was shot down by the Covenant Fleet, he had hoped that she was alive, and his belief was rewarded as he and Cortana were able to find her cryo-pod and take her with them to Reach, she stayed on their newly acquired Covenant Flagship, the Ascendant Justice until Cr. Catherine, along with Will-043, Kelly-087, Grace-093, Fred-104 and Admiral Danforth Whitcomb came with them and the creator of Cortana and the closest person to a mother to him and the other Spartans resuscitated Linda and she was brought back into the fightâ€|much to his relief.

On their mission on the Unyielding Hierophant, she provided cover for him, Grace-093, Will-043, and Fred-104 , and there she had her best shooting record ever as she shot down five Elite pilots out of their flying Banshees, she made sure they escaped but she was willing to die so they could escape, but he was not about to lose anyone else and therefore, he ordered her to let him rescue her. She called in their code of Oly Oly Oxen Free and he located her NAV marker and he was able to rescue her in his own Banshee and they made it back to the Gettysburg and headed back to Earth.

That was the last he ever saw of Linda and the othersâ€|and he hoped that they were still alive and safe.

He then put those thoughts aside and went on with his practices runs and took down the other targets, and as he was going to do the routine of loading the Sniper Rifle, he turned to see Cortana walking towards him, he could see that she was a bit tired and needed to rest, and since she was wearing her normal clothes and not her Register uniform, he could guess that her shift was over. With that, he put aside his sniper practice aside and walked over to her.

Cortana smiled warmly at her friend and protector, she might have a few friends on the ship now, including her boss Gascogne, but she still felt more comfortable around her long time protector.

"How are you doing Cortana?"

"Oh, the usual, got my break for a time and figured I'd see how you were doing, how's the practice?"

"Doing fineâ€|you look like you need something to eat, let's go to the galley."

Cortana couldn't help herself and decided to tease the giant Spartan a little, just like she usually did when they were together on missions and when they were not getting blasted at by the enemy forces that they usually dealt with.

"Is that a request for a date John?"

Before the Spartan could comment, she smiled and took his armored arm and began to pull at him to follow her. She was not as strong as he was so there was no way she could force him to follow her with her own physical strength, but he didn't fight her and followed her wish to go with her.

"I'm just joking, but thanks for not arguing with me, by the wayâ€|where's Hibiki?"

As they walked to the Megele galley to see what was on the menu, he told his companion of what he knew on where the young teen was.

"He's supposed to be making modifications to his Vanguard today, so he should be in the Hanger Bay right now. I gave him the time off for that part of his job, he needs to make sure that Vanguard of his in good working order. After that, he has to go to the Medical Bay for a check-up with Duero and Paiway. I might have to deal with something about him soon enough though."

"What do you mean? What's wrong with the kid?"

"He gets tired too quickly, and I've noted some past injuries to him, I don't know why, but I think he needs not just the right diet, but also decent medical care to be stronger."

-----

In the said Hanger Bayâ€|

As the three Paeksis enhanced Dreads were in their berths and on standby, one of the occupied Vanguard Hanger Bay's was currently occupied by the young Vanguard pilot and his partner. The teen looked a bit different from beforeâ€|no doubt from his time under the Spartan's training and supervision. He was a bit taller and had more muscular definition, though not that much at this point and time, though he was still wearing his normal clothes from his home-world. With him was his handy tool bag and mechanic's supplies as despite having systems flooded by the Paeksis, the Vanguard still needed regular Vanguard maintenance to fix any bugs and Hibiki was the kind of guy who wanted everything to work just fine. He also wanted to fix

any leftover damage from the time that alien Space Urchin ship had fired on them both.

Still, the young man was still very tired, having been working out under the Spartan and working on several matters with Gascogne watching over him. Though he had been working out to improve his physical self, he was still not very healthy. Since he was a Third Class Citizen on Tarak, he and others like him barely got decent medical care when they were sick or injured, as it was reserved for the upper classes on their world, thus they had to make due and tolerate it when they were sick or injured so it was not very surprising that he was not as fit as some of the other men.

As soon as he closed the panel, he sighed as he spoke to his partner

"They really know how to work a guy to the ground around here, don't they buddy?"

Unknown to him, while he was busy giving off some complaints about how tired he was and the women not all that appreciative of his efforts, a certain redhead was about to ambush him. Dita did her best to climb up the ladder to surprise her Mr. Alien and since Hibiki had his mind on other things, she did just that as she fired a floating heart right at him. As soon as the floating heart hit Hibiki, was very much startled, hit his posterior on the bar and landed down on his back.

Hibiki sighed and spoke carefully.

"Maybe I'm just not eating properly again."

It was then that he spotted Dita looking at him while she was standing up.

"Are you okay?"

Hibiki didn't say anything right now as he tried to make sense of his exhaustion, unaware of the fact that he was very much looking up Dita's skirt for some reason, he felt this suddenly feeling of embarrassment and managed to get up to his feet and sit on the floor. Dita looked at him, concerned somewhat as Hibiki seemed very much exhausted, and the two of them heard a loud sound coming from Hibiki's stomach.

In the Medical Bay

Hibiki was now bare of his clothes and wearing only his loin-cloth underwear as Duero began to check his vital signs on a health monitor, that showed that while he was exhausted, he was still fine so far as the young Doctor placed his next sensor right on Hibiki's forehead and the next one on the right side of his face.

The Tarak teen suddenly reacted when Duero placed his hands on his leg and run them up and down. He was not aware that the young doctor was checking to see if there were any growths in his muscles that could be a sign of something being physically wrong with him

"Hey?! What are you doing?!"

Duero looked somewhat surprised at Hibiki's reaction and naturally replied.

"I'm examining you."

Hibiki glared a bit and replied still in a very wary tone.

"Keep those hands to yourself!!!"

"You've been acting really tense lately Hibiki, not to mention that you appear to be very exhausted, are you still not getting used to being trained by the Spartan?"

"You might say thatâ€|he wakes me up in the middle of early morning and starts training me with the same exercises as before, not to mention working with those women is really tiring, not to mention protecting them. Fighting side by side with them is no picnic at all Duero."

Duero looked a bit surprised, but smirked at the very same time at Hibiki's words.

"So you're protecting the women, kind of an odd twist for a man of Tarak to take, don't you think?"

"Wellâ€|I am stronger than them, after all the training the Chief's been giving meâ€|and theyâ€|are well, weaker than I am, though not all of them areâ€| I mean, they are good pilotsâ€|but still, it kind of feels, right to be protecting themâ€|somehowâ€|"

Duero smirked a bit more and noted the slight elevation in Hibiki's pulse rate, along with his twiddling of his fingers, and realized that maybe talking about women right now was not a good idea for the still exhausted Tarak teen.

"Maybe we should not talk about the women for the time being, you need to rest and get some more food."

"Good idea Doc."

It was then that Paiway showed up and looked at the pulse monitor that the Tarak medic was using to check on his fellow man's current medical condition.

"What's this thing? A video game?"

Duero was somewhat surprised by that question as he knew that before he had been assigned to the Medical Bay, Paiway was the chief medical officer on the pirate group and thus was knowledgeable on most if not all medical equipment and devices used in medical treatment, and the most basic of those devices was naturally the pulse monitor he was using. He wondered why then was she not familiar with basic equipment.

"You mean you don't know that it's a pulse monitor?"

Paiway then gave the young doctor a slightly annoyed look, and replied back at his question.

"What's it to you if I haven't seen one? Anyway, all health problems

can be fixed in the Jacuzzi!"

Both men looked at one another with some note of confusion as to what sort of place or location on the Nirvana was Paiway talking about, of all the places on the ship, they had never heard of this place called a Jacuzzi.

"Jacuzzi?"

"What the heck is that?"

-----

In the said roomâ€¦

"Ah, space battles always damages my hair."

The blonde Dread pilot, Jura Basil Elden said as she lounged on a salon chair with a towel wrapped around her head, keeping her long blonde hair from flowing out. She was naked, save for another large towel wrapped around her body. She continued to relax as several attendants were massaging her legs and there were others who were giving her a manicure and a pedicure.

"Don't worry Jura. We're here to revive your beauty." One of the attendants assured the blonde Dread pilot.

"I appreciate it. I don't feel like going into battle unless my hair is set just right."

Pyoro floated around the room and was now beside Jura, being a machine and not a man, the little automaton was allowed into the recreation center where the women relaxed and took the time to clean themselves. As he observed them he wondered just what was going on here.

"Sometimes I just don't understand humans at all, as they make no sense."

Jura sighed as she felt her body tension melt away from the massage she was getting, she moved her head to the side and saw a hot tub where Meia soaking in it.

"Meia, are you trying to lose more weight again?"

"Excess fat gets in the way of combat."

The blue-haired girl replied to her blonde comrade's inquiry in a simple way.

"But you won't have any breasts left at that rate."

Jura pointed out to her leader.

"Heh. Don't worry too much about me. I can take care of myself Jura."

Meia wasn't as interested with maintaining her feminine appearance as her blonde comrade was.

-----  
In the galleyâ€|

Many of the women were taking their lunches and were enjoying the mood as well as the food, however, one table was given some fair distance by the others, and for some good reason, as there was Cortana and the Master Chief, he had decided to take off his helmet, showing his face once more in public as there was no way at all he could eat his meal with his helmet on.

Many of the women tried not to look, but couldn't help themselves as they looked at the Spartan who was not wearing his helmet, they were whispering about how pale he was, almost like his skin was permanently bleached and some of them commented on how scary he looked. He paid them no mind as he focused on eating his meal, of sliced beef, cooked in barbeque sauce, greens and mashed potatoes, this dish was among the ones not all the women touched as they were conscious of their weights, which he knew was to be expected from an all female world.

He didn't mind the change of pace from the usual MREs and Rations he normally ate in years of fighting in the UNSC Covenant War, but a change of pace was sometimes welcome as he continued to eat his food with the methodical patience and efficiency of his eight years of UNSC Marine training on Reach.

Cortana however took her time to eat her meal with relish, which was hot rice with well done sliced mutton and diced vegetables, the former UNSC AI loved the feel of the hot food that she was chewing and eating, though she didn't gain too much weight, apparently the method in which she returned to her AI form and back to her human form gave her a strong and efficient metabolism, meaning that while she may eat a lot of food, she used up all the food well and didn't need to store the food as fat, allowing her to retain a slim, but well formed figure.

"No matter how many times I eat, I never get tired of tasting new foodâ€|does you're food taste good too John?"

"Good enough."

They then spotted Dita as the redhead stared intently at the nearby food conveyer belt that ran from the kitchens to the galley and back, allowing the women to easily get their dishes by merely picking them up from the belt and taking them to the tables. It seemed that Dita was looking for a particular meal of some sort.

It was then that her comrade Barnette was arriving to get one of the dishes for her own meal, and the emerald haired woman then selected a dish that had sliced fillet mignon, with baked potatoes and some basil on it with a tag of 789 calories. Naturally Barnette was surprised to find her intended meal in the hands of the bubbly Dread pilot.

"I think I'll take this one!" Dita said cheerfully as she held the meal in her hands.

Barnette was not very happy with what had just happened and made Dita aware of her displeasure as she glared at Dita.

"Dita! That's loaded with calories, why would you want that?"

"That's all right Barnette, he told me he wasn't eating right."

Dita said with a smile as she headed off with the meal, leaving Barnette confused to who she was referring to. However the two former members of the UNSC military already had an accurate idea as to who the young redhead was referring to.

"Bet ten to one that meal she has is going to wind up in Hibiki's stomach before long." Cortana said with a smile as she looked at the redhead.

"No doubt." John-117 replied as he continued to eat his meal diligently.

"Do you think Dita's got a crush on our young trouble maker John?"

"I wouldn't know really, but if their situation is the same as ours, I won't be surprised." John replied without cracking a smile, making Cortana blush a bit and laugh.

It showed to her that while the Spartan didn't take her too seriously when she made jokes about the two of them having a relationship, he did appreciate her company, and with that in mind she left and got to the conveyer belt and grabbed another meal, this time it had smoked fish with soy sauce, hot rice, asparagus, and hot bread. She then placed the meal before the Spartan who was somewhat surprised at the sudden gift.

"What's this for?"

"It a giftâ€|for making me laugh, like I said, I do know how to pick them."

With a slight hint of an amused smile, the Spartan nodded as he finished his first meal, and then when on with the second course.

"Lucky meâ€|thanks for the meal Cortana."

"You're welcome John."

-----

On the bridgeâ€|

"Heat signatures have been confirmed."

Ezra then looked over on her own scanners and made her own report on her findings.

"There's a very large sandstorm in the area so I can't be entirely sure Captain, but there appears to be signs of habitation on the area we are currently in and several large artificial structures as well."

The bridge crew was very much busy with their duties on monitoring the planet that they were currently orbiting. As they were getting ready to start a ground operation, Buzam then began to tell the Elderly women that they would have to make ready a ground team, they however had to use Vanguard's for this operation.

For their advanced weapons, armor, systems, and more, the Megele built Dreads had one fatal design flaw, they were never designed for planetary operations. The Dreads were meant only for space borne operations and were not able to handle land operations.

"I think that it is best that we do investigate the surface Captain, we might find not just information but supplies as well."

"Hmmâ€|the kitchen is running a bit dry so no sense not stocking up on some fresh supplies. All right then, we'll do this like old fashioned pirates."

"Thank you captain, attention all crew members, we are about to begin a surface operation, begin monitoring weather conditions and also begin calculating the best location for a landing zone to be where our forces shall be deployed, along with the right time to send them down there."

As soon as Buzam made that announcement, she made another one that really got the attention of all the people on the ship. But most of all, the men, she decided to inform the ground team that would be sent down of their new form of transportation.

Dita currently had an arm load of food with her as she tried to hide from the nearby galley staff, but as she was now sure that she could escape, the communications system throughout the ship came to life and Buzam's voice came on.

"Attention all crew members, we are going to being a landing operation to the surface of the planet below usâ€|All crew members are to report for simulation training for Vanguard operations."

Cortana and John-117 were busy in the UNSC section, running through the manufacturing section's latest inventories when they heard that announcement, they were surprised at the call, as they knew that since the women from Megele considered the machines of men to be ugly and fashionable, they would not dare themselves to be seen using the mecha, but now it seemed that the higher-ups have just decided to take it up a notch.

Cortana smiled a bit.

"They're going to use the Vanguard's? Wellâ€|this will be interesting."

"Maybeâ€|but I doubt Hibiki will like it much." John-117 remarked, as he considered Hibiki's love for the Vanguard's and his still lingering distrust with women.

And the Spartan was right, since Hibiki was in his current bunk and heard the announcement, and he naturally reacted in the expected pattern.



"WHAT?! WOMEN ARE ACTUALLY GOING TO USE THE VANGUARDS?!"

-----

In the Hanger Bay where the Vanguard's were being stored

Ever since the incident that had flung them half way to this side of the universe and into the aliens' back-yard. The Vanguard's were there on the newly named Nirvana, but unlike the Dreads, the Vanguard's were not used in most of the battles, and were naturally beginning to show signs of neglect and disuse, no doubt due to the women not finding a need for them—so much so that the pirates have even cannibalized them for spare parts. Now however, since this mission was going to be on the ground, they were about to get into gear and be used for their maiden purpose—combat. Thus they were getting repaired, refueled, and more in order to get them all back to operational condition.

The women however were not impressed with the Vanguard's, namely in their current color scheme of gun-metal grey and metallic silver, as such, the women began to paint them and place colorful patterns on them, in order for them to look more—presentable.

Barnette sighed as she, Jura, and Meia, along with a handful of female Dread pilots looked at the Vanguard's that were still being colored up by the engineering teams.

"Geez, I know that the Dreads were never meant for atmospheric operations on a planet, but that certainly doesn't mean I have to like using the Vanguard's."

Barnette disliked the mecha and she was very much opposed to them as weapons. Jura on the other hand was not concerned with that as she had her sights on something else entirely as she looked in the direction of her own mecha, since she had in her favorite shade of crimson, after her Dread, and it was armed with a sword.

"I really don't care much if it's a Dread or Vanguard, just as long as I can combine to make something beautiful."

At this point, the young cadet Bart took the time to boast once more. "Hey there! If anyone has any questions, feel free to ask me! During my long years in the academy, I have endured hundreds of training missions. You could then say—"

He didn't have the time to finish boasting when he was—

KLONK!

Bart stopped as he was floored by an anti-gravity lift came down right on top of him. The technician who was on the lift gave a look down and scolded the young boastful cadet, "What are you doing standing under the lift? We're busy here so try to stay out of the way!"

"Okay." Bart moaned as he rubbed his sore head.

Hibiki ran into the Hanger Bay was stunned somewhat at what the women had done to the Vanguard's—but as he directed his gaze to where his

Vanguard was, he gasped as he spotted Dita on the ramp, and she was brandishing aâ€|SPRAY PAINTER?! He didn't need to look around him to know just what the young redhead had in mind.

"HOLD IT! DON'T YOU DARE!"

Hibiki cried as he immediately rushed to his mecha. The mere thought of having his Gundam decked out in cute colors made him feel very uneasy and uncomfortable.

On the ramp, Dita readied and aimed her instrument at the Gundam. "I'll make Mr. Alien's partner clean and pretty! I'm sure that Mr. Alien will really like it!"

Just as Dita fired off a stream of pink paint, Hibiki arrived and stood between her and his Vanguard, and the liquid smashed right into the young Tarak teen. As a result he was doused in the liquid, he was now half covered with the paint, making him look very weird.

"AAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGGHHHHHHH!!!"

As soon as he got the paint out of his eyes, Hibiki directed a rather angry glare at the young Dread pilot.

"WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING THIS TIME?!"

Dita however, didn't pay attention to his angry look and voice, as a starry look showed itself in her eyes.

"WOW! A PINK ALIEN! HOW CUTE!"

Hibiki glared at Dita as he couldn't believe that she was still fawning like that after dousing both him and his partner with pink paint.

"She's really crazy!"

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

Magno and Buzam smiled as they saw the arrival of the Spartan and Cortana, the two saluted them as Cortana once more let herself enter the holo-tank that was reserved for her, and moments later, she was now in her human sized AI form before the Captain.

John-117 then spoke to the Captain as he placed his hand down and waited for his new set of orders from the elderly woman.

"You wanted to see me Captain?"

"Yes I didâ€|Chief, I am very aware that you have proven yourself to be a very capable soldier, and as such, I will be asking you to be part of the landing team as well, since you know ground warfare as I have seen on you're records. Since you have means of transportation already at your disposal, along with your own supplies, weapons, munitions, and more, I don't think you would need to use any vanguards, am I correct?"

"Pretty much, I'll go on ahead once the team is ready."

Buzam wondered why the Spartan wanted to be the first ahead of the strike team that was to be sent out, and she didn't wait long for her answer as the Spartan spoke then on why he wanted to go ahead of the others once they were all in ready position.

"I'll go down there and secure the drop zone for the others once they are ready, Cortana will be able to patch into my Mark VI so I can send you all here some of the first view information."

Buzam thought about it and nodded.

"I'll pass that information to the rest of the ground team, though it will take us a bit before we can send them down as we still need to find the best candidates for piloting the Vanguards from the crew that we have here right now. This will not be easy for any of them since none of them have any field experience with the Vanguards."

The Spartan nodded as he recalled seeing the Vanguards when the women were busy painting them, he didn't say anything at first but he found their ways of coloring up the Vanguards to be better looking was down-right foolish and stupid from a very strict military stand-point, doing that announced you as a target to the enemy.

Putting that aside, he asked permission to leave so he could see the performance of the women who were going to be part of the landing group, he had no doubt that since Hibiki was the only qualified Vanguard operator in the entire ship, then he was no doubt going to be part of the team for this mission.

Cortana and the bridge girls worked on the scanners, but the three of them, Cortana, Belvedere, and Amarone began to get suspicious as they were not picking up any life signs on their respective scanners and the UNSC AI tried using a well known old Colony frequency to see if anyone was receiving the message she was sending out.

"Oddâ€¦|"

Both the women turned to look at the AI as she began to scan again.

"What's wrong Cortana?"

"I don't get itâ€¦|there's nothing on any communication frequencies, no repliesâ€¦| nothing, either something's gumming up my sensors or no one's on this planet."

Belvedere then looked through her scanners and so did Amarone and they found out that Cortana was right, something was very odd with this worldâ€¦|they picked up plenty of heat sources on the world, but absolutely nothing on their life scanners, it was as if this entire planet was deserted or abandoned, but what could have made this world barren and it's inhabitants leave it in such a state?

"Cortana's rightâ€¦|there's plenty of heat sources to suggest possible habitation, but nothing shows up on life scanners, something's not right."

"Do you think that those aliens we fought with have something to do with all this? Could this be part of some plan of theirs?"

Buzam looked at the two of them and replied as she looked at Ezra's own scanners as the pregnant woman did her own work.

"Keep your eyes on the monitors, once the storm clears and the results are in, we can send in the landing party to get some answers."

"Roger."

-----

In the simulation room

As the Spartan observed the training runs of the women, he made a quick guess that since the women were trained in long range strikes and maneuvers in their Dreads for a very long time, they were more used to flying Dreads and this meant that they were totally ill-prepared for the rigors of warfare demanded by the Vanguard.

While the Vanguard did not have the armor, fire-power, and technological advantage of the Dreads, they made due with versatility, close combat mastery, and adaptation. This was proven true as the Vanguard were made by the men of Tarak to fit their psychological profile of close combat preference, and while the Vanguard were not as well armed as the Dreads, they were able to be equipped with more weapon types and systems than the Vanguard, that and their ability to function on planetary surfaces and in space made these units very well suited for the operation, but the pilots were not.

Many of the women were weeded out by the training program until it only left Dita, Barnette, Jura, and Meia, and it was during these said exercises that he observed them in combat simulations while Hibiki, Duero, and Bart were watching. Hibiki was not yet used to women but was not very hostile towards Cortana, and it seems that they were getting along well enough, no doubt due to Gascogne being around Hibiki a lot as well. The young boy was now bare of the paint that once covered him as he and the others looked on at the women as they went through the combat simulation run.

As the women faced off with their opponents, their weaknesses were very obvious as they thrashed about rather poorly.

"I've had it! What is wrong with this thing?!"

Jura said as she got even more upset at how foolish she looked out there on the virtual battle-field, thrashing about like a panicky child.

"Why can't this thing move with a lot more elegance?! I'm out of here!!!"

With that she pressed the switch and got out of the simulator, much to the Spartan's disappointment, with time and training, the blonde lady might make a good Vanguard pilot, at least to him, though he

then found himself looking at her figure for a bit longer than intended as she flung her hair aside and began to walk out of the chamber. He briefly had an image of Cortana in the same outfit Jura wore, and Jura in the same outfit Cortana wore as well, but he pushed the brief thought aside as he gazed at the other pilots as he noted that despite her dislike for the machines, Barnette had some latent talent in her with the mecha.

"Don't you need permission to quit the training?" Pyoro asked as the Navi-robot looked on with the others.

"Oh be quiet!"

As Duero summed up Jura's performance records, along with Dita's and Barnette's, since the redhead, despite her clumsiness with the Vanguard was good enough to pass the initial trials, he sighed and spoke out to his cohorts.

"Looks like I'll be heading up to the bridge."

Hibiki snorted as he looked at the results and replied.

"I told you so, there's no way a woman from Megele can be a better pilot in a Vanguard than a man of Tarak."

"Don't be so sure of that." The Spartan replied.

It was then that both him and Duero noted something else that demanded attention—Meia's life support readings coming from the simulator's sensors, Hibiki noted that as well, and instead of saying anything looked on as to what the other two were looking at, he also noted that meia seemed to be breathing much harder than before and seemed to be unfocused on what she was doing. The Tarak teen then looked at his mentor and saw the stillness of the Spartan, that told him enough that the Spartan was concerned with what he was looking at.

"What's wrong Master Chief?"

"I think we have a problem with Meia—I know those symptoms and that condition anywhere."

Duero nodded as he recalled his medical classes and lectures concerning the symptoms and readings he was looking at.

"So do I—but let's be certain first—"

-----

In the simulator—

Meia pounded the side of the cockpit with deep frustration as she saw that she had failed her simulated mission dismally and was considered killed in action by the computer. She tried to calm herself down and keep her focus. It was then that the comm.-link came online and she heard Duero's voice.

"Are there Medical overrides on Megele?"

"What are you talking about?"

Duero's face became even graver as he spoke once more.

"On Tarak, doctors like myself are given full authority to ground pilots who find themselves in situations such as the one you happen to be in right now. Do you want that to happen?"

Meia glared and snapped back with her emerald eyes blazing.

"Of course not!"

"All right then, I suggest you switch you're video monitor settings to wide screen, that should make the strain you're mind and body a lot less difficult and keep you focused."

"Keep you're opinions and advice to yourself! I don't need help from anyone, least of all you! I'll be just fine, thank you very much!"

-----

Elsewhereâ€|

"Hmmmâ€|. How to use the ten-in-one knife shieldâ€| following the will of the pilotâ€|ah, simultaneously with the electron pulse beam! I can do this!"

Bart smiled as he went back to reading the Vanguard instruction manual he was reading.

Whatever Bart, just keep doing whatever it is you're doing."

Hibiki was tired and decided to stretch a bit and move out of the room. However his attempt to leave the room was stopped, as his vision was blocked by a very ample amount of cleavage and added the fact was that he was pressed between them instantly stopped in his tracks as he gazed up and found himself being looked at by a certain blonde Dread pilot as he felt himself suddenly become rather slightly uncomfortable for some rather odd reason.

"Hello there."

Jura said as she smiled her best at the Vanguard pilot.

"In the next battle, you will be combining with me! I hope you remember that."

After she and Barnette left the training center, Hibiki was confused by her actions and for some odd reason he felt a lot more uncomfortable once that was over and done with.

"What the heck was that all about? Maybe I should ask Master Chief for some advice on what's that blonde woman talking about."

-----

Back at the simulation roomâ€|

The simulation unit that Meia was inside of opened there was Meia,

panting and lying on the consoles, tired and very much covered in sweat and breathing quickly and with shallow intakes of air, as if trying to calm herself down a lot more.

"I'm very concerned about her Doctor."

Duero nodded at Pyoro's words as he and the Navi-robot looked at the young Dread squadron leader. Meia's state was another indication to the Tarak medic that she was indeed suffering from a very serious medical condition that had something to do with very tight spaces, namely that of a Vanguard unit.

"Meiaâ€¦I was looking over the medical readouts and the symptoms you have appear to be psychosomatic in nature, and that tells me that there is something that happened to you that got you with this condition, do you have any clue as to what had caused this?"

Meia looked at him, a bit calmer now, and she gave him a snide look and replied.

"Hmph, your diagnosis couldn't be any more wrong. It's nothing more than fatigue Doctor."

Duero sighed slightly.

"An adamant denial I seeâ€¦well, this tells me that this case is far more serious than I thought it was."

"I am not denying anything, it's just fatigue, nothing more."

With that, Meia managed to get out of the cockpit and the two moved out of the way to let her pass. However, she nearly collapsed and Duero managed to catch her to prevent her from injuring herself further, but instead of being grateful, the woman violently pushed Duero's aid aside and got to her feet and moved on, but not before turning to look at the physician and spoke in an angry tone.

"There's nothing I hate more than nosey people."

With that, she left the roomâ€¦leaving Duero and Pyoro to discuss the uniqueness of human nature. However, the two were not aware of the fact that the Spartan was watching the whole thing and while Duero said that although he was a highly skilled and knowledgeable medic, he was a man on an all female ship and his opinions no matter how valid they were would not carry enough weight on the Nirvana, thus despite his better judgment, he would hold his peace.

However, John-117 was not the kind of person to let this stop him, he was concerned with the safety and survival of the pirates who were going down thereâ€¦and he knew that with her condition, Meia was not an asset to the mission, but a liability. It was harsh, but it was the truth.

-----

As she walked down the corridor, Meia turned to the next hall and found herself facing the Spartan who had his hands crossed over his chest. She glared at him and spoke.

"What do you want?"

"You're not going on this mission."

Meia became more angry at that emotionless comment, she was not in the mood to be lectured by anyone, especially a man, despite the man being a seven foot tall armored warrior that was far more powerful than she was, she had her pride and determination, and those had seen her through some tough times in her life, she didn't need help or advice at all from anyone.

"Who are you to say that?!"

"I am going to be part of the ground teamâ€|advanced recon for that matter. And I was there when the Doc took you're medical scans in that simulator, I know what is wrong with you Meia, I have seen it beforeâ€|and it is a liability, and it makes you a liability as well on this mission."

"You're as thick headed as that male doctor! It's just fatigueâ€|nothing more!"

"Don't even think you can lie to me about that Meia. I KNOW claustrophobia when I see it. As it stands you are a danger to the ground team, and to yourself, you're better off staying here on the ship."

"How dare you?! I am an officer on this ship and I lead all the missions the crew takes! What makes you think you can give me orders?!"

"You are the Dread Team leader, I am not contesting that, but I happen to be a Master Chief Petty Officer, and that is a higher rank in the Navy to a Fighter Squadron Leader, and that makes my rank higher than your own, second only to the Commander and the Captain, so I do have the authority to keep you out of this mission."

"That rank and authority is in YOUR dimension, not mine!"

"Fair enough, if not rank, then on the grounds of common sense. You know what will happen to you when you are in a Vanguard cockpit Meia, I don't need to tell you the details, you nearly froze up in a simulated mission, what happens if we encounter the foes and you freeze up again? You will endanger everyone on this mission and yourself. Do the right thing Meia, not just for yourself , but for the others as wellâ€|"

The Spartan then turned to leave the Dread pilot alone to think about what he said to her. He didn't out much hope that she would listen, her nature told him that much, but he hoped that she did have common sense, enough to make the right call.

"â€|And right nowâ€|the right thing to do is not to be on this mission."

With that, the Spartan left the scene.

-----

In the bridgeâ€|



"Hey old lady! You there?"

Buzam and Magno turned to see none other than Hibiki looking very irate and seriously concerned about something. The elderly woman knew that he was looking only for her and would not speak to anybody else, since there was not much for her to do at this point, she then decided to take the call and kind out just what was the problem for this youngster.

"There's an old lady right here little one, what is it you want little one?"

"First off, tell you're women to stop messing up the Vanguard's! Geez, all that coloring, we're on a mission for Grand Pa's sakeâ€|not a paradeâ€|Anywayâ€|"

Hibiki's next line of words were suddenly cut short when he heard another voice and spotted a certain someone coming right at himâ€|forcing to cut communications with the bridge.

"Augh, she's here again!!!"

Cortana was laughing at the whole thing and holding her stomach with her hands to try not to fall over with laughter as she was still in the holo-tank, while Buzam looked on, totally confused with what she had just witnessed, while Magno couldn't help but chuckle alongside Cortana as well.

"It's really ironic now that I look at it, the ship's gotten a whole lot livelier ever since we brought the men onboard."

"Yeah." Buzam said as she still was confused by all that had just happened.

-----

At one part of the shipâ€|

"Ahhh! What do you want this time huh? Don't tell me you're going to douse me with paint again!"

Dita however smiled at Hibiki and presented him with a new clothe wrapped lunch box.

"I'm not going to douse you with paint Mr. Alien, here, I brought you another one, I heard you were still hungry so I made some more food for you."

Hibiki looked down at the box and that was when his stomach once more made that little sound cue that told him he was rather hungry again. With that in mind, he wasted little time and took the box, with Dita following him.

-----

In the Bio-Parkâ€|

Hibiki was once more eating the food at a rapid fire pace as he sat on the large picnic clothe along with Dita. Dita was smiling the

whole while, as she watched Hibiki eat away at her newly cooked meal for him and she liked it when she knew that Mr. Alien loved the food she was giving him.

Hibiki noted her stares at him and he quickly turned around and went on eating, however he had to stop when Dita once more moved to follow him and stare at him once more—he had no idea what the redhead was doing, why she was doing it, and why was she always smiling at him, with those questions in his mind, he looked at the redhead and glared a bit.

"Why the heck are you staring at me like that?"

"It's nothing, it just makes me feel happy watching you eat."

"Hmmm—"

Hibiki sighed and focused back on eating once more, the food really helped him with getting his strength back and that was enough, even if it was a bit confusing as to why this young woman was always looking at him.

"Seeing you eat like that makes me feel so happy."

Unknown to the two of them, they had an unexpected guest watching the whole proceedings. Paiway watched Dita and Hibiki and then took several pictures and smiled secretly at what she managed to gather.

"Hehehe—I got you—Pai Check!"

-----

In one of the showers of the women—

Paiway was now inside another chamber as she gave her latest news to her comrade Jura, not minding the fact she was covered in dirt, twigs and leaves. The voluptuous blonde was currently in a stall taking a shower

"— And there they were, having a nice little picnic. The thing I noticed is, he was completely under Dita's control. And that was all because of one little boxed lunch."

Jura smiled as she heard Paiway's report.

"Hmmm, I see. That is one good bit of information I can use."

She then began to plan her newest attempt to convince Hibiki to combine his Vanguard with her Dread, now with this little tidbit of data, she just might have an edge now, that coupled with the help of her friend Barnette was going to make sure she was going to be a sure fire winner..

-----

At the kitchen—

"That's the reason why I'm doing all this cooking?!" Barnette asked,

as she was quite irritated as soon as she learned the reason why her partner Jura had requested her to cook one of her special meals, a fillet mignon, which Barnette was famous for.

"It's so I can combine." Jura explained; as she was rather busy admiring the polish of her nails. "You do love me when, I'm beautiful, don't you Barnette?"

Barnette sighed in irritation, as she knew that once her comrade had an idea in her mind she intended to follow it through, and then she gazed around and smiled evilly when she spotted a bottle of hot sauce. Without making Jura notice, she began to pour liberal and rather large portions of the bottle's contents and added quite a few choice spices to the mix as well to the fillet mignon she was preparing.

"All right, I'm done."

"That's why I love you Barnette. Let's go find him. I can't wait to see the looks on his face!"

/ Neither can I.\ Barnette thought evilly.

Unknown to the two of them, another person was in the kitchen, Bart snuck into the place to find out just what exactly was it about the food made by women that Hibiki seemed to be more interested in that Tarak food rations, as soon as the women were out of the area, he went straight for the table and he looked at the pots, woks, and everything else Barnette had been using to create the meal. He was surprised at the mess and couldn't help but frown a bit.

"What is this stuff? Is this really the food women eat?"

With that, he grabbed one of the leftover bits from the pan and ate it, unaware of the liberal contents of tobacco sauce, and spices that Barnette had put into the mix. He was soon to find out as he got up and fired out a tongue of flame and his lips turning puffy red.

-----

Elsewhereâ€¦|

John-117 was busy gathering his supplies and equipment for the recon mission, he made sure to pack a good stock of ammunition, weapons, and some rations, just in case he might need them. He and Cortana had already worked out a plan and that was to have him drop in first, while a Pelican Drop-ship would be on standby, a good distance from the surface and drop him ammunition canisters and once the mission was complete, the drop-ship would come in and pick him up as the rest of the team would leave the area.

This meant that he would have to take one of the HEVs in the HEV Bay to get to the surface, and secure the drop-site for the rest of the landing party. He checked his newly added weapons, which included his usual MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, a BR55HB SR Battle Rifle, a M90A CAWS Shotgun, and a Weapon/Anti-Vehicle Model 6 Grindell/Galileian Nonlinear Rifle. As soon as he had the weapons stored into his HEV, all he had to do was wait for the call from the Captain or the Commander to let him out.

As he stepped into the HEV, which was armed with a copy of a dumb AI program, and sealed himself in, Cortana contacted him.

"Take good care of yourself down there, and hold on to your helmet."

"I will."

-----

In the Bio Park

Hibiki had no idea just what was going on, he had just managed to avoid Dita and head off to his vanguard, but he was suddenly stopped by Barnette and Jura, before he could even find out just what was going on and what they wanted, they grabbed his arms and began to drag him to another part of the park.

"Hey! What are you two doing to me?! What's the big idea?!"

His next barrage of questions disappeared when he spotted the tray table on wheels that several containers on them, and he wondered just what those were. He didn't have to wait long as Barnette took off the cover of one of the dishes and revealed the very first dish, the fillet mignon that Barnette had secretly doctored. He was stunned and smiled the meal quickly.

Jura took the chance and whispered into her target's ear in the most seductive voice she could manage at point and time.

"If you agree to combine with me, then you can eat this one."

Hibiki frowned, he should have known there was a price attached to the meal, and despite his suddenly returning hunger for food, he stubbornly refused to be bribed in such a fashion.

"Fine then, I don't want it."

Jura smirked, she was not the shallow blonde most would mistake her for as she could tell that Hibiki was affected by the food, and she was closing in for the kill as she smiled.

"Too bad it's so tasty it's to die for."

-----

In the kitchen

/Women eat stuff like that?! And Hibiki's eating those things there's no tomorrow, that guy's really tough! He should be in the military to be able to tolerate that stuff!\

Bart thought to himself as he downed yet another glass of water and tried to cool down his badly burned tongue and lips after eating the super spicy bit that he had taken from the still unwashed cooking skillet that Barnette had been using. He then took a long drink and felt some measure of relief as the water cooled his tongue. However, the door to the kitchen opened and in walked a certain young red-haired Dread pilot.

"Mr. Alien, where are you?"

Bart quickly turned and spotted Dita, and after managing to cool his tongue, he began to speak.

"Ohâ€¦it's youâ€¦"

"Oh, hello Mr. Pilot, are you all right? Your face seems kind of weird."

Bart realized that he still has the puffy lips, he placed down the glass quickly and then covered them with his hands, the last thing he wanted was for the news of what happened to spread all over the ship.

"Ohâ€¦it's nothing really!"

Dita looked on at him and noted that the ice cream she was carrying for herself and Hibiki was already starting to melt, and that was not a good sign.

"Uh oh, that's not good, you want some?"

Dita offered the ice cream to Bartâ€¦who naturally screamed out as he recalled what had happened when he tried a bit of the food, and seeing such a large pile of the stuff before him, he was NOT going to risk igniting his innards and killing himself. (He was not aware of the fact that ice cream did nothing of the sort on people.)

"Noâ€¦No thanks! Maybe some other time! See you!"

With that, Bart left the kitchen in a hurry, making Dita very confused as to what had just happened before her. It was then that she spotted Ezra walking into the kitchen, with a large collection of sour dough bread in her hands and she was currently munching on one right now.

"Men certainly do strange things, I saw him sneaking in here and getting some food from the pots."

Dita looked at her friend with some considerable confusion and asked.

"Ezra, why are you eating all that sour dough bread?"

Ezra blushed a bit as she took another bite from the one she had on hand already, and gave a sheepish smile.

"I just had this craving for something sour today."

Dita smiled at that as she knew that Ezra's cravings were due to her growing baby and she hoped that Ezra would have a healthy baby girl.

-----

At that exact moment on the bridgeâ€¦

Amarone scanned the surface and got confirmation that the sandstorm

had just died and the weather conditions were good enough for them to send down the landing party, but she knew that they had to send out the advanced recon unit first to make sure that things on the surface were good enough for the teams to land in ahead.

"The planet's surface is stabilized Commander, we have good conditions to send in the ground teams!"

"That's goodâ€|Cortana, tell the Master Chief he has the green light."

"Understood, you heard that John? Time for you to, as the ODSs always say, 'Jump feet first into hell!' Good luck John."

On the monitors, John-117 nodded and spoke to Buzam.

"Commander as soon as I am out of the ship, send them down after me."

Buzam nodded and waited for confirmation that the HEV was now released. And sure enough, in the HEV Hanger Bay, the clamps that held the Master Chief's HEV pod were released and the pod slid out of the Hanger Bay.

Outside of the Nirvana, the HEV pod left the area as the bridge crew looked at both images from inside the HEV pod through the Master Chief's optical camera feed, and their own scanners as they tracked the podâ€|as soon as it was entering the atmosphere of the planet, the pod began to heat up.

Amarone, and Belvedere tracked the pod and were in shock as the temperature in the pod and outside of it began to grow even hotter, and Buzam was concerned as well, the numbers showed that the heat was rising to the point that it could very well cook a person in their own body fluids, even with all the protection the Pod had on.

"He must be very braveâ€|" Belvedere said as she tracked the pod.

"â€|or insane!" Amarone commented as the heat continued to rise as Duero came, along with the others, Magno herself was in awe as the Spartan seemed to be relaxed as the whole thing went underway.

"Has he done this before Cortana? The whole Drop pod insertion thing?"

Magno asked the AI as she monitored the Spartan's life readings. The AI nodded as she smiled, her scanners showed him to be in good health as the pod dropped in.

"Yes, he's done this before, If I were to recall right, this would be his second HEV insertion, the first one was rather bumpy, I was there with him as well, when I was still an AI."

Buzam then gave the order for the rest of the pilots to get ready, it was time to begin the landing operation.

-----

In the Bio Parkâ€|

Hibiki has just given in to Jura's cajoling and had taken a piece of the fillet mignon and was about to eat it, Jura was eager to see this and when it worked, she would have Hibiki wrapped around her finger. Barnette on the other hand was eager see the young man panic and scream in pain as soon as he ate the meat and ingested the spices, they were not enough to kill, but enough to seriously cause pain.

However, the alarms went off and Hibiki turned, realizing that the mission was now underway and despite his own reluctance to leave the meal behind, his training under the Spartan told him to drop everything that he was doing so as to get into the mission.

"Ah damn itâ€|this is no time for eating, I'll see you guys at the Vanguard's!"

Barnette able to avoid dropping the plate as Jura looked on in surprise as Hibiki took off to meet up with them in the hanger Bay so as to get his own Vanguard ready for combat deployment. Jura however was not happy that her plan had been foiled and called out to Hibiki

"Don't forget that you promised to combine with me!"

-----

Outside in deep spaceâ€|

"I won't let the women make a mess out of my partners!"

Hibiki was currently the first to leave the Nirvana and head for the planet below. His Vanguard was armed with a special rocket umbrella, behind him were the three Vanguard's, one belonging to Jura, the other to Barnette, and the next to Dita. The drop-ship was like a sled used by old Earth bobsledders and was designed to allow groups of Vanguard's the chance to drop in simultaneously into the battle zone. Beside the ship was one of the Pelican Drop-ships as it was launched from the UNSC Section of the ship.

/Damn itâ€|they're here too?\

Hibiki thought as he accelerated his Vanguard as the drop ship followed him.

Inside her Vanguard, Jura controlled the drop-ship in order to keep up with Hibiki, after she had gotten over her first bad performance, the blonde was able to use the Vanguard better. She kept herself right after Hibiki and smiled warmly.

"I'm not going to let you get away that easily."

Dita however was not going to have Jura get her fingers on Hibiki and she made her intent known to her blonde comrade.

"You stop that right now Jura! The only one Mr. Alien is going to combine with it me!"

Jura glared back at Dita and replied.

"You keep the heck out of this and be quiet!"

Both women glared as Barnette sighed to herself.

"Hopefully this mission will be over soon."

It was then that they all got within sight distance of a small pod like object, they wondered what that was as it was not detected before.

"What's that thing doing out here?"

Jura asked, her argument with Dita momentarily forgotten as she managed to get a closer look at the pod as it was beginning to become even redder from the heat of reentry.

They got their answer as Buzam came on their communications networks.

"That pod is a HEV, or Human Entry Vehicle, it's used by the UNSC to send out advanced special forces infantry to the surface of planet before the main strike force. The Master Chief is inside that pod, he will be the advanced recon member of you're party. The Pelican following you will be his support ship and his way of getting off once the mission is over."

The women were shocked at that and Hibiki was as well. He had wondered why the Spartan was not in their group. Barnette had wondered if the man had chickened out, and Dita wondered if Mr. Green Alien was left behind.

"The Master Chief's inside that thing?!" Hibiki asked, with awe on his face.

"That he is Hibiki, he volunteered to go ahead of you and the others to recon the planet. Considering the way the HEV works, we're lucky that we do have the Tarak Vanguards."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Barnette scanned the pod and was stunned to see the massive numbers that indicated just how hot the pod was getting as it was pushing through the atmosphere.

"The temperature's enough to flash fry a human being into cinders!!!"

Cortana then broke in and spoke in a calm voice.

"Don't worry about John, he's done this before, it's his second HEV insertion."

"HE'S DONE THIS BEFORE?!"

Cortana then told them what a HEV pod was, what it was made of, what it could carry, and what it was used for. She then smirked a bit and told them how lucky they were compared to the Spartan and the ODSs as they were in the Vanguards. She then told them about the various ways the HEV could fail and kill the occupant inside of it, either



from the heat of reentry, or from the failure of each system, from the metal drag chute, to the secondary chute and the retrorockets. That, and the significant g-forces one feels as the pod slows downâ€|which could make anyone in the HEV lose consciousness.

Needless to say, the women were in shock and awe as they gazed at the pod as it was now halfway through the atmosphere.

"Mr. Green Alien is so brave!!! He's amazing!!!" Dita said as she smiled at the pod.

"Brave?! Amazing?! Dita are you blind?! He's insane!!" Barnette said as she looked at the pod, thankful that she was not in such a pod right now.

"He may be insane Barnette, but Dita's right, he is brave to go down a planet in that coffin." Jura remarked, her opinion of the Spartan rising a bit more as she looked at the now red hot HEV pod.

Hibiki's own reaction was one of awe and respect, John-117 had just proven that he was a true man in the eyes of the teen, and that made Hibiki even more determined to win the Spartan's respect. He wanted to be a man just like the UNSC Super Soldier.

As soon as they were able to get past the atmosphere, the Vanguards on the sled activated their own umbrella rockets as Hibiki had used his to shield himself from the heat of reentry, As they drifted, they saw the metal drag chute of the HEV open and the pod slowed down and kept it level. The chute then released as the pod was still on course and then they got a communications signal from the HEV and then they saw the Spartan's faceâ€|showing that he was very much alive and safe.

"I'll be touching down shortly, see you guys on the ground."

The pod streaked down like a meteor and then the retrorockets fired in a moment and the pod slowed down. The landscape of the planet came into view of the Spartan and he beheld the desert landscape with massive structural ruins jutting out of the sand and the various dunes were covered in various piles of junk. It reminded him of Voi before the Covenant were pushed out of the city and before the Flood landed in the area.

The pod smashed into the dunes and a massive boom was heard as the Spartan waited inside, the door punched out from the explosive charges on the hinges, allowing him to step out. As soon as he did so, he took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and the BR55HB SR Battle Rifle, the Assault Rifle on his back as he had the Battle Rifle in his hands as he looked through the scope and scanned the area and moved about somewhat. He then contacted the Nirvana.

"This is Spartan-117 to the Nirvana, I have made planet fall and I am securing the drop-zone now, are you getting my data feed over?'

-----

On the bridgeâ€|

"We read you John, and we're getting the data feed right nowâ€¦how was the trip?"

"Bumpy if you want to know."

Cortana smirked as she kept the data feed link up between her and the Spartan, The women who were on the bridge when told of what the dangers were for those who used the HEVs were impressed that the Spartan was unharmed and ready for combat once he hit the ground.

"The Vanguard's will be hitting the area in a minute John, I'll have the Pelican drop off your ammunition supplies now and I'll send it back into orbit."

"Understood."

-----

Back on the surfaceâ€¦

John-117 looked up to see the vanguard's approaching the area and head of them was the Pelican which was also being piloted by Cortana via remote uplink, the Pelican hovered a good distance from him and dropped off a few supply canisters near his HEV. The extra fire power might not seem needed at first, but those could be picked up later, and if there was one thing he and Cortana knew intimately, it was to never go into battle without a full arsenal just in case things get too dicey.

He then waited as the Vanguard's began to land on the surface, the first to land was Barnette who did well on the landing as she deactivated the umbrella mode of the rocket, while Jura landed on a dune but slipped, and Hibiki crashed into another dune with a squawk.

He shook his head a bit and continued to scan the area before him, he was happy to note that Meia was not among the ground team and he hoped that she had taken the advice and stayed out of the mission for today.

-----

Boy was he wrongâ€¦

-----

In the Hanger Bayâ€¦

"Darn it! I didn't make it in time!"

Meia swore as she was now in the Hanger Bay and her uncolored Vanguard was in the area. She had hoped to be the one leading the ground team as she was indeed the leader of the pirates' forces, but she had not arrived in time for the deployment.

Pyoro arrived and then spoke, hoping to keep the Megele woman calm, he had been there when she and the Spartan had the conversation between them.

"You shouldn't be pushing yourself like this Meia. Won't they be fine without you on this mission?"

"This shouldn't have happened! I'm responsible for all of themâ€|even that Spartan!"

"The Master Chief can take better care of himself you know, but the real problem is that the Drop we have is only a one way use, there aren't any other Drop-ships on the Nirvana's inventory right now."

Meia didn't like the sound of thatâ€|

-----

On the surfaceâ€|

The Spartan moved around in the area, doing his run of scanning the location for threats to him and the ground teams, while the Vanguard's also looked around as well, however, the women were not doing things in proper formation, at least to the mind of the Spartan.

Jura looked about and seemed very bored.

"Just look at this place, it's completely deserted."

"You're right, there's no need for Meia to be down here with us right now."

Barnette answered as the two of them moved about, the Spartan wanted them to stay close and move as a team, but like before, he didn't have the access codes to the communication systems to those Vanguard's, the same way he had no communications with the Dreads in the past until Captain Magno gave him permission and Cortana then gave him the access codes, he only could communicate with Hibiki's Vanguard at this point and time.

He didn't like the silence on this planet, it reminded him way too much of a trap. With in mind, he placed his Spartan Laser and M90A Shotgun with easy reach of his HEV just in case he needed to run back and get them.

/This place is too quiet.\

"Wow! Look at all the sand!"

Dita exclaimed as she also looks about to see what was in the area of their current location.

"Hey! Don't you go wandering about on your own out here! This is not some sort of field triâ€|.whoa!!!!"

Hibiki had tried to climb up a dune, but his very much high lack of ground warfare experience quickly shows as his Vanguard slips, lands on it's back and slides down the dune.

" Mr. Alien!"

Dita then began to guide her Vanguard towards Hibiki, just as the Spartan contacted the young Tarak Vanguard pilot.

"Hibiki, you all right?"

"Yeah, but I'm really embarrassed now, this is my first time moving and using my Vanguard on land and now look at meâ€¦flat on my back and looking stupid."

Before the Spartan could answer that, he spotted Jura's Vanguard as it closed the gap and landed on top of Hibiki's own Vanguardâ€¦in a rather suggestive way. The Spartan couldn't help but stare at the sight as he tried to figure out just what the blonde Dread pilot planned on doing with Hibiki.

"Well nowâ€¦this looks like a good a place as any for us to combine don't you think? So let's get on with itâ€¦"

Jura spoke a very seductive way, and Hibiki couldn't help but feel even more confused and somewhat uncomfortable as he gazed at the blonde Dread pilot, though why he still didn't figure out, which made him wish the Spartan, having worked with Cortana for a very long time could at least tell him how to deal with women. It was then that he heard yet another voice getting involved.

"You out of you're mind?! You want to do it here?!"

"Stop that right now!"

The Vanguards looked and saw Dita's Vanguard nearby. Inside her own Vanguard, Dita was not very happy and made her displeasure known.

"The only one Mr. Alien's going to do it with is ME!!!"

Jura naturally retaliated at that remark.

"Now wait just a darn minute Dita! Who do you think you're talking to here?!"

Dita knew for a fact that she was still and apprentice Dread pilot, and while Jura wasn't always in the lead, the blonde was the second in command of the Dread Fighter Squadrons, next to Meia, therefore, that made the blonde her commanding officer, and talking back to her was not the sign of a good person, and Dita' didn't like to fight with her comrades in the piratesâ€¦but when it concerned Mr. Alien, it was a different story.

"Wâ€¦.Well you can't do it!!!"

Jura and Dita began to glare at one another, neither willing to back down and let Hibiki get a way from them.

Naturally, Hibiki was not in the mood to be fought over like some sort of trophy, it was demeaning to him and he made his displeasure obvious as he shouted out and activated his Vanguard's thrusters.

"WILL THE TWO OF YOU JUST CUT THAT OUT!!!!!"

The Vanguard Hibiki piloted took off in a flash, but that was when the Spartan spotted something in a building nearby and from what he

could see it was some sort of warning device and he saw a flash. He realized that it was a triggering system and Hibiki's actions must have been sensed, the Spartan immediately realized it was a trap.

"HIBIKI!!! SHUT DOWN YOU'RE ENGINES!!!!!"

The Spartan took aim at the device with his Battle Rifle's scope but he then noted that several more laser beams began to appear in the area of their landing zone, showing him that there were more of the things around their area and even if he took one out, others would replace them. He then noted that they were not firing in random, but were firing into a set patternâ€”like a netâ€”

"Damn it!"

Barnette likewise saw the laser beams and commented quicklyâ€”

"What the heck's that?!"

It was then that a beam fired out from the structure near Barnette and quickly slammed into Hibiki's Vanguard. The shot quickly disabled Hibiki's Vanguard temporarily and sent the youth falling back down as arcs of energy surrounded the Vanguard and him as well.

"AAAAUUUUUUUGGGGGHHHHHH!!!!"

"HIBIKI!!!!"

John-117 shouted as he saw his charge fall down. He quickly scanned the Vanguard using the advanced optics and was happy to see that Hibiki's vital signs were still good, he was just caught off guard as the optics allowed him to detect Hibiki via heat and bio sensors.

"MR. ALIEN!!!!"

Dita and the others looked on and before they knew what was happening around them the sand suddenly seemed to come aliveâ€”even if there was no wind anymore. The Spartan noted that and got ready for anything.

"What the heck's happening over here?!"

Jura shouted out as she and Barnette spotted the sand coming right at them at high speed like waves on a beach.

-----

In the Nirvanaâ€”

Duero was busy monitoring the life signs of the ground team when he noted the change in Hibiki's life signs, then it was on Jura's Barnette's and then Dita's. The changes told him quickly that something was going on down there, amazingly enough, the only one of the landing party who showed no signs of surprise was John-117 as the Spartan's life signs were normal.

"The pulse rates for the Vanguard pilots are rising very fast,

something happening down there."

Buzam wasted little time and quickly spoke to the bridge crew.

"Give me a status report, what's going on down there?"

"There appears to be some sort of defense system that was activated somehow." Amarone reported.

"The landing party is being held in place by some sort of energy grid shield, the only one that is not being held down is the Pelican Drop-ship that is above the shield right now Commander."

"Cortana! Is the Pelican armed with any weapons?"

Cortana nodded and began to show Buzam and the others the data specs of Pelican Drop-ship.

"It's got two ANVIL- II ASM Pods filled with eight missiles, and one rear entrance mounted AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun."

"Can you use the Pelican to free the ground team?"

"Negative Commander, from the looks of that shield below I can't begin to start, there's too many emitters in place and not enough ammunition in the Pelican to do enough damage. The weapons might take down some of the emitters, but there might be more of them down there."

Buzam nodded at that, as she knew that Cortana was right, who knew how many emitters were there and even if some were to fall there was no telling how more would take their place.

"Ground team can you hear me? What's going on down there?!"

John-117 was the first to show up on the monitors.

"We had a commotion down here and Hibiki was spotted by some sort of scanner and triggered the trap. The section of the planet we're on was nothing more than bait to lure us down here."

"What's the status of the others Master Chief?"

"Not goodâ€¦"

The rest of the ground team appeared on screen as Jura, Barnette and Dita were in shock as they tried to make sense of what was happening to them all.

"What the heck is going on?!"

"It's no use, the shield's completely surrounded us!"

"Mr. Alien is going to die!!!! Please help him!!!"

"Calm down everyone! What sort of trap is it?" Buzam said, hoping to keep the situation from getting even further out of hand.

"Ahhhhh!!!!"

"I don't know!!!!"

"Theâ€|the sandâ€|it's attacking us!!!!"

Buzam was stopped cold by that and looked on in disbeliefâ€|

"The...the sand is attacking?!"

-----

On the groundâ€|

Dita was not kidding as the sand that covered the planet began to cover up their Vanguard's at a pace that was not normal by weather pattern standards, it was almost as if the sand seemed to be alive as it spread all over the Vanguard's.

"What the heck is up with this sand?!"

Hibiki shouted as he looked at the sand that was rapidly covering up his partner's form and body. Dita likewise was panicking as well as she tried to use her Vanguard's arms to block the sand but the sand seemed to spread over her Vanguard's body rapidly and seems to move on it's own as there was no wind to move it along.

"There's something really freaky about this sand!!!"

"What is this stuff, there's no way this is normal sand!!!" Jura said as she looked at the sand covering the surface of her own Vanguard.

"It's almost like it's actually alive!!!" Barnette cried out as it was also covering her Vanguard.

The only one who was calm on the surface throughout all this was the Master Chief as he stood in the sand, knowing that any movement from him would only made the sand even harder to move in. However, he quickly looked at the sand that was on his Mark VI and spoke to the bridge.

"Cortanaâ€|can you scan the sand sample?"

"Give me a few moments Johnâ€|"

-----

Up on the atmosphere, another umbrella rocket was coming down to where the others were and then the umbrella units broke off to reveal Meia's own Vanguard as she began to guide her mecha down to the surface.

"This is Meia, does anyone copy? Is anyone down there?"

On the bridge, Duero couldn't believe his eyes as Meia's picture appeared on his monitor along with her vital signs below Dita's own.

"She's pushing herself."

-----  
John-117 was not worried as he quickly scanned his Mark VI and noted that while the sand had covered him it couldn't damage his systems. He then noted that the sand seems to be trying to actually absorb him, or rather his Mark VI's systems as he picked up faint scanner readings coming from the sand itself, but his shields seem to be holding the sand offâ€|however, he waited for Cortana to send him her analysis of the sandâ€|it didn't take very long for Cortana to send him a field report.

"The sand's actually mixed with what appears to be nano-bots, the nano-bots are the ones that are moving and controlling the sand on that planet, and from what I can see, the nano-bots are scanning and trying to copy you're Mark VI's systems, but it seems that you're shields are acting as a buffer and preventing them from touching you're Mark VI and copying the system, it can only copy you're basic body form. The nano-bots appear to be advanced but are like slavesâ€|"

"What do you mean by that?"

"They seem to have only basic information processing functions and are similar to a to a Class C AI, only having one function and that is to gather information and control sand, nothing more. That must mean that they are under the control of a much higher level system."

"How do I get it off?"

"I have an ideaâ€|I can transmit codes into your Mark VI so you can make an EM screen into you're shields, the EM will deactivate the nano-bots as they seem to be very much vulnerable to EMP and that will return the sand to normal and free you. Don't worry John, the EM won't harm you're shields and it will keep the sand off of you."

John nodded and waited as the codes were sent down, and when they were send, the Spartan quickly uploaded the data to the Mark VI and sure enough the shields were now able to emit passive EM energy/ The results were very much to Cortana's predictions as the sand was briefly glowing and fell off of him like the way a fish sheds it's scales. It didn't take long for the Spartan to be free and able to move once more. He did the same thing and his weapons on his hands were very much free of the sand and the electronics systems of the weapons were already shielded from EMP so they were not affected by the new amounts of EMP coming from the Mark VI.

The Spartan then saw Hibiki's Vanguard try to stand up but he fell down once more as the sand was rapidly covering his Vanguard. The Spartan then tapped into the communications of the Paeksis enhanced Vanguard to find out what was happening to his charge.

"Damn itâ€|I can't move at all!!! What the heck is going on?!"

"Hibiki! Don't move your Vanguard! The sand will only cover you even faster and become even harder if you struggle."



True to the Spartan's words, the sand had hardened all over the Vanguard and stiffened it to the point that it fell on it's back and was unable to get up as the layers of sand continued to thicken all over the Vanguard. Dita then managed to turn her Vanguard to the side and try to reach Hibiki's own Vanguard.

"Mr. Alien!!! Try to hold on! I'll do what I can to help you!!!"

Dita tried to move her Vanguard to reach the fallen Vanguard but her own Vanguard was getting stiffer as the sand began to cover her own Vanguard. Hibiki noted that very quickly and communicated to the redhead.

"Don't try to force it! If you keep on moving, the sand will keep on spreading further!"

"Leave this to me!"

Jura said as her Vanguard suddenly came over to Hibiki's Vanguard, and amazingly enough, her crimson Vanguard was free of the sand that had tried to cover the others as well. Barnette also appeared to be clear of the sand as well. As soon as the crimson vanguard landed on Hibiki's own Vanguard, right on the hips no less, the blonde activated her thrusters in reverse and the air vents on her Vanguard fired out a massive blast of air. The air blast moved the sand away and for then Hibiki noted that with the sand off of his Vanguard the response systems of his Vanguard were now a lot better now.

"Thanks a lot!"

Jura then smiled as she replied. "You're welcome. By the way, why don't we combine? That's what I want in reward for freeing your partner."

Hibiki glared once more at Jura sighed a bit and he gave an unbelieving expression to his face.

"Are you still stuck on that combining business? If so I think you've forgotten something, and it's the fact that there's no way that I can combine with your Vanguard. My Vanguard can only combine with your Dread. How do you expect me to fuse my Vanguard with your Vanguard anyway?"

Jura gave a shocked and rather disappointed expression. "Are you joking?! NO! Why didn't you tell me before?! I shouldn't have trained for this mission!"

-----

Meia tried her best to guide her Vanguard properly for landing, but the Vanguard landed hard on the surface of the desert planet, which was now in a blazing sandstorm. Her cockpit was covered in darkness for a few moments and was now in deep red as the emergency lights kicked in, as several systems were now offline.

Due to the sandstorm that arrived unexpectedly, she had landed several hundred meters from where the others were. As soon as she opened her eyes and looked around, her eyes widened and her breathing became rapid and she took in air in short gasps, her heart rate began

to gain speed and thundered in her chest. Her forehead became sweaty and her eyes widened in fear and terror.

It was then that Duero's voice managed to reach her through the comm.-link on her Vanguard.

"This is not good!!!Meia! Meia! Do you hear me? Turn on your main monitor! Look as far away as you can! Meia! Can you hear me?"

Duero called out in a commanding voice as he tried to get Meia to recover.

The young Dread pilot reached out with a trembling hand and activated a switch to bring her monitor back online.

"Heâ€|should mind his ownâ€| business!"

As the monitor came back to life and showed the barren and sandy landscape, her breathing came back to normal and her heart rate returned to being steady. However, the Dread Leader's relief was short lived, as she caught movement, something was heading at her direction, right for where she was.

"What's that?"

Meia had no time as she spotted a Vanguard coming out of the sandâ€|and it was also made out of sand as well. Before she could even consider trying to defend herself, the Sand Vanguard erupted outwards and slammed like a tidal wave into her Vanguard.

Meia could only look on in fear and scream in terrorâ€|

-----

The Nirvanaâ€|

Belvedere gave a gasp of shock. She was monitoring the scene on the desert planet and was watching the markers that told her where the landing party was. Her cry of shock was due to the fact that one of the markers had disappearedâ€| Meia's marker on her Vanguard.

"Meia's mecha has disappeared from the sensors!"

"What was that?!"

"The pilots are hopelessly confused and afraid, they are all in grave danger!!!

BC acknowledged the report from Belvedere and Duero's warning and immediately got into contact with the landing party. "Barnette! Jura! Dita! Hibiki! Master Chief!!! Do you copy? Meia has disappeared! You have to find her!"

-----

As Meia's Vanguard was being covered by the sand, she was in panic as the red lights flashed in her cockpit as she held her face with her eyes wide and her face in fear.

"W-W-What should I doâ€¦? I am so scaredâ€¦."

-----

"What?!" John-117 called out as soon as he got the message from Buzam.

"I repeatâ€¦ Meia's mecha has landed some distance from where you and the others are. But she's no longer in our sensors' display! Find her!"

"Roger that!" Master Chief called out as he and the others were now nearing their recovery from the massive storm of sand that threatened to hinder them. The Spartan kept his calm, but he was not very happy with what he had heard as he had hoped that Meia had taken the hint and stayed on the shipâ€¦now she was down here and no doubt in danger..that and her claustrophobia as wellâ€¦

It was then that the Spartan and the other Vanguard pilots found themselves facing another threat as several of the same Sand Vanguards that attacked Meia appeared before them and the Sand vanguards began to close in and walk to them like a pack of zombies.

"Whâ€¦Whâ€¦What are they?!"

Once attacked Jura with a fist strike and the blonde was barely able to block the attack and was forced to move back as the Vanguard charged at her. The blonde was naturally in a panic as she was not expecting to be suddenly attacked on this mission and by a copy of her own Vanguard made from sand no less.

"S-Somebody help me!!!"

The others were already in a panic as they tried their best to fight back with the Sand Vanguards but were not getting far as the Sand Vanguards far outnumbered them and were able to be reinforced by more of them. Dita also stated that the Sand Vanguards' attacks were copying their systems, and it was like their blood was being drained out. It was then that they lost communications to the Nirvana.

It seemed that things were going to get even worseâ€¦

Until the Master Chief took the plate, as his link to Cortana was unbrokenâ€¦he knew that with them not having any form of leadership structure, they would be in serious trouble as more of the Sand Vanguards were coming in. he then studied their numbers and the Vanguards. He knew that while the Sand Vanguards were numerous, they were only limited to close combat, and while the real Vanguards were designed for close combat as well, they were equipped with weapons and that would give them the advantage they needed. He then contacted Hibiki and issued an order.

"Hibiki, download me the communication frequency to all the other Vanguards now."

Hibiki did so and in a few moments, the Spartan contacted all the members of the ground combat team.

"All Vanguard pilots, this is Spartan-117, I am taking full operational command of this mission, All Vanguard pilots are to get their weapons and place themselves behind one another to as not to get separated from one another and attacked."

Barnette, despite being engaged by one of the Sand Vanguards was not in the mood to be ordered around by a man, even one like the Spartan.

"I don't take orders from men!"

The Spartan however was not in the mood for dissent in the ranks of his newly acquired fire team and replied to Barnette's rebellious words with an emotionless and stern tone.

"Either follow my orders or you will die here, is that clear?"

Barnette growled and didn't reply.

"I'm right behind you Chief!"

Hibiki said as he managed to fight off his foe and took out his Vanguard's energy sword. The Spartan nodded and reached the HEV that was still there and took out his Spartan Laser and put aside his Assault Rifle and Battle Rifle as the weapons won't be very effective against foes that sizeâ€|but the Spartan Laser was more than enough to handle them.

He then took the lead and when Dita's Vanguard was about to be surrounded by the enemy Vanguards, he moved past their legs, moved in front of Dita's Vanguard and fired a powerful beam from the weapon that quickly sliced deeply into the Vanguards and destroyed one, allowing Dita to launch out a punch at the head of the Sand Vanguard. Dita cheered as she spoke to John-117.

"Thanks for the save Mr. Green Alien!"

"No problemâ€|Hibiki, Dita, both of you fight side by side and follow my lead, we need to hold a good combat position before we can go and rescue Meia. Jura, Barnette you do the same and get ready to fight."

With that, the Spartan spotted another trio of Sand Vanguards coming right for them he aimed the weapon and fired, but a split second moved the Spartan Laserâ€|while the beam was not in a straight line, the movement caused the laser beams to scatter and was now a mass of split laser beams that sliced into the torsos of all three targets with ease, reducing them back into sand.

"Whoa! That was some shot!!!"

Jura replied as she was able to fend off her attacker and Barnette coming to her rescue in time with her Vanguard's massive axe, as the two decided to follow the Spartan's orders, though Barnette was still very much against following the Spartan's commands.

John-117 then took to the ammunition canister and acquired the PP-16979/AM-Sh recharger for the Spartan Laser and quickly began

firing beam after beam on his foes with deadly accuracy, allowing the Vanguard's to regroup and rally together and fight more cohesively. He had paired them with each other and told them to fight in unison and to cover one another as he provided them with support fire with his Spartan Laser as beams of destructive energy slammed into the Sand Vanguard's as they tried to recover, some of the sand beings were either losing arms, legs, or heads, or had their bodies blown in half by the shots of the Spartan Laser. Every time he ran out of juice for the Spartan Laser, the Vanguard's would provide him with support as he recharged his weapon and fired another barrage.

Soon enough, the numbers of Sand Vanguard's were dropping to the point that Hibiki, Dita, Jura, and Barnette were able to even up the odds as they got into the swing of things. They moved in formation and began to hack and slash their way through the remaining Sand Vanguard's with the Spartan supporting them with the Spartan Laser. The Spartan then took out a Missile Pod from the supply canister and took the massive weapon and was blasting away as the fast moving missiles blew apart the sand Vanguard's like they were nothing but paper targets in a shooting range.

As soon as the numbers of Sand Vanguard's dropped to the point that the Master Chief was assured that one of the fire team members could go out and find Meia, he checked the data once more as he had asked Cortana to fill him in on Meia's last known location, as soon as he was able to triangulate the location, he spoke to none other than Barnette.

"Barnette, you need to go and find Meia, we will provide you with covering fire."

"I saidâ€|"

"I know, you may not like me since I am a man, but the life of you're comrade Meia is on the line, the more you argue with me, the more likely she will be lost, are you willing to let you're pride and this belief that all men are the enemy be the reason she dies?"

Barnette gulped a bit and Jura spoke to her best friend.

"The Master Chief is right Barnette, you have to find Meia nowâ€|Grand Ma knows how much danger she is in right nowâ€|we'll be all right, so get going please."

Barnette nodded and quickly made her way to Meia's location as the others got ready to face off with the next batch of Sand Vanguard's. As soon as Barnette's Vanguard was out of sight another batch of Sand Vanguard's came out to engage the remaining ground team, but this time, they were not alone as a large number of human sized beings came out to follow the Sand Vanguard's. And these beings seemed to be about the same size as the Spartanâ€|apparently, whatever controlled the sand Vanguard's realized that while the Spartan was not in a Vanguard, he was the overall leader of the group and from the weapons and the way the Spartan fought and led them, he was a deadly threat and had to be taken out.

The Spartan spotted the large number of Sand replicas of him and knew that the device that was controlling the sand nano-bots must have sent them to deal with him alone. He quickly placed aside his Missile Pod as the figures came at him slowly and got his Assault Rifle and

Battle Rifle. The weapons unleashed their rounds right into the new enemy types as the Sand Vanguard concentrated on the Vanguards.

Dita was now able to use the punch blade attached to the Vanguard she piloted, while Hibiki used his Vanguard's energy sword, and Jura also used her own sword and began to use her training in fencing, unknown to others with the exception of her family and Barnette, Jura didn't carry the rapier on her waist merely for show, in her youth, she was the premier fencing champion of her school and despite the vast difference of using her own arms and that of the vanguard, the training was paying off. The Spartan also was busy blasting away at the Sand Copies of himself and the bullets ripped through the sand being effectively as more of them were reduced to sand.

"John! I have something that might help you in that ammunition canister! Grab it and use it!"

The Spartan heeded Cortana's advice and went to the canister and took out one massive looking hammer with a long shaft, a large head with lines of energy on it, a power cell on the back and a massive blade at the back. He knew that this was a Type 2 Energy Weapon/Hammer, or better known as the Gravity Hammer. The Brutes loved this weapon and only high ranking members such as Captains, and Chieftains were ever seen using themâ€|considering the close calls he had with such foes on more than one occasion, he knew that these were not weapons to look down upon.

He hefted the weapon and used it and his Assault Rifle to smash through the Sand Copies of his Mark VI, as the bullet rounds left them into piles of sand, he was able to completed his reloading of the Assault Rifle when he spotted a Sand Vanguard lumbering towards him and he took out the Gravity Hammer. The Spartan moved out of the way in a roll as the Sand Vanguard tried to crush him with it's foot, but that was the opening he needed as he rapidly got to his feet and swung the Gravity Hammerâ€|the weapon smashed through the other leg and left the Sand Vanguard with only it's raised legâ€|naturally forcing it to fall down and before it could recover or regenerate, the Spartan smashed the head of the Gravity Hammer right on it's head, crushing it. The Spartan then swung his weapon right through four of the sand Copies that tried to ambush him and the blow smashed them all into sand and sent the sand flying, another one was crushed into sand from head to feet with one powerful downward swing from the Gravity Hammer. All throughout this he kept track of the Vanguards and monitored their conditions and locations as they were given friendly marker tags by his systems.

Another Sand Vanguard tried to grab and crush the Spartan with it's arm, but the Spartan merely stepped aside and smashed the Sand Vanguard's arm off with one blow and spun the Gravity Hammer as best he could, and despite the slow speed of the Gravity Hammer in attack, the blow was enough to slice the head off of the Sand Vanguard, sending down for the count as the Spartan took out his Assault Rifle and fired another lethal barrage into their ranks. He then fired another fresh load and then took back his Battle Rifle and used the scope to fire three round bursts into the newly advancing crowds of Sand Copies to send them back down. The M634 9.5x40mm X-HP- SAP rounds did their part as they sliced down more of the Sand Vanguards as the Spartan fired with a clean, efficient, methodical, and patient approach. He still commanded the Vanguards and kept them focused and organized

Hibiki, Dita, and Jura were impressed by how the Spartan fought and commanded them as he spoke in a calm and patient manner, almost like a seasoned commanding officer, both women thought that he was like Meia in a way, while Hibiki thought that the Spartan would be a truly worthy addition to the men of Tarak and their military if he was born there. This was natural as the numbers of Sand Vanguard were being cut down in a much faster pace than they could regenerate.

It became obvious why the Spartan was part of the ground team as he knew land warfare better than anyone else, as he grabbed his Spartan Laser once more and blasted apart groups of Sand Copies and took down several more Sand vanguards that were trying to overwhelm the ground team with their numbers.

-----

The bridgeâ€

Buzam and Magno nodded as they saw the location the thing that was controlling the sand that attacked the landing party. It resembled some sort of insect, like a tick and according to Cortana, it was using slave nano-bots to control the sand. It was too risky for the ground team to leave and hunt it down as they had to rescue Meia.

"So the Chief was right in this being a trapâ€|no doubt left by our enemies." Magno said with her eyes narrowed.

"What's happening down there BC?"

Buzam looked at the scanners and was quite surprised as she looked at the results.

"The Vanguard are mounting a very fierce counter attack and are also doing well on defensive actions."

"Really? Is Barnette the one leading them?"

Magno had been told by Buzam and Duero that out of the Vanguard candidates that were chosen for the operation, Barnette was the one who had the most skill out of the other female pilots.

"No Captainâ€|she's been sent out to find Meia."

"Then who's leading them?"

Cortana smiled and replied.

"You already know who is leading them Captain, he might not pilot a Vanguard, but considering his Mark VI, his weapons, training, and his experience in ground warfare, he's more than capable of leading the ground team."

"The Master Chief is in command?"

"Correct, he knows what he has to do for this mission to be successful, he didn't become the leader of the entire Spartan II Super Soldier teams for nothing. He might not excel in one field like the others do, but he is more than balanced in all of them, but his

leadership talents among the Spartans are unquestioned, though his friend Fred-104 comes close. Don't worry, with him in the lead, the ground team will be all right."

-----

On the groundâ€|

Cortana's words were very true as the Spartan continued to reload and rearm himself, while leading the Vanguard pilots with calm and precise commands, showing that he is the best officer to be chosen for ground operations and battles. He was currently using his M90A Shotgun and the Spartan Laser to support the others as they held off the enemy force, that dedicated themselves to taking out the Spartan and his fire team. The Spartan provided the ranged firepower to take out the Sand Vanguards and thin their numbers, and took out the Sand Copies of himself to even up the odds a bit more.

As another sand Copy fell to the groundâ€|riddled with fifteen pellets from the Soelkraft 8 Gauge Shell that the M90A used, the Spartan fired another shell right into the face of another Sand Vanguard that tried to come closer to him, he then took out one of his Fragmentation Grenades and tossed it into a band of the Sand Copiesâ€|blowing them all to hell. He then took out the Spartan Laser and fired a spread fire shot at another bunch and blew them all to hell with one massive blast. He then contacted Barnette to give him a progress report on her attempt to find Meia.

-----

Barnette was looking as hard as she could for Meia's Vanguard when John-117's voice came on.

"Barnette, have you found Meia?"

"Not yetâ€|waitâ€|my Goddessâ€| it's Meia's Vanguard!"

"What's her status?"

"Her Vanguard's covered with Sand! I'm going to try and free her!!!"

Barnette knew that she couldn't use her Vanguard's air vents to free Meia the same way Jura had done, as her vents had been damaged during the fighting before the Spartan took command of the operation and had led them to making a counter attack. Thus she decided to use her shovel extension and began to move the sand off of Meia's Vanguard.

Suddenly the sand covered Vanguard suddenly took off and pushed aside Barnette's Vanguard, the sand covered Vanguard suddenly slammed into the force field and that had an even worse effect on the situation that they were in. Suddenly loud alarms filled the air, and several large structures began to rise from the ground and began to move and expand.

"Barnette! What was that? What's Meia's status?"

"The sandâ€|it's gotten control of Meia's Vanguard, it made her Vanguard trigger somethingâ€|it's moving her to where we



were!"

-----

"What the heck is happening now?" Magno asked as they suddenly picked up massive energy spikes from beneath the surface of the planet.

Belvedere offered her report as she and the others scanned the area.

"The self destruct system for the defense system has been activated, there is at least 300 hundred seconds to detonation."

"That's not good!" Magno commented.

"This is Buzam to all members of the Landing Party, you have to evacuate from the area now!"

-----

On the surfaceâ€|

"We can't go anywhere right now Commander, the shield is still up and as long as that shield is online, there's no way we can leave."

John-117 replied as another Sand Copy has smashed by the Spartan's fist as the Master Chief reloaded his weapons and led the Vanguard.

"That's right, if we could leave this moment, we sure as hell would have done it already!"

Hibiki said as he managed to slice down another Sand Vanguard and then spotted yet another one coming up the dune behind them.

"What?! Another one? How many are there?!"

He took out his smaller throwing sword and was about to fire when Barnette's Vanguard came beside the new unit and spoke to them all, just as the Spartan also turned after blowing apart another Sand Vanguard with the Missile Pod, it was already out of ammunition and had to be left behind.

"Don't fire! That's Meia, the sand's taken control of her Vanguard and she can't get it to move at all!"

"What did you say?!"

-----

"200 seconds to detonation!"

Buzam and Magno looked on as Cortana kept herself calm, but she spoke then to the Master Chief.

"Johnâ€|things are about to get very hectic down there, better get out as fast as you can!"

-----  
Inside the mecha, the Dread Leader was in full state of catatonic shock and naturally was unaware of what was happening outside of her machine. She was shocked back into reality as something smashed into her Vanguard and knock it to it's back. She then heard Hibiki's voice in the communicator of her mecha.

"What the hell are you doing in there?! Taking a bloody nap? We don't have the time for this sort of thing! Get that stuff off of you right now!!!"

Hibiki then tried to remove the sand with his Vanguard's hands. But every-time he managed to brush off a layer of the sand; it would be replaced by an even thicker coating.

"S-stop that! Forget about meâ€|save yourselvesâ€|" Meia said weakly.

"Will you cut that out?! Stop being so selfish!"

Hibiki shot back at her. "Your reason to live right now may be to make life for me on the ship a living hell. But I'd feel like crap if I'm just going to let you die in front of my eyes today! Don't think for a moment that life is all about you!"

"Damn! I'm not getting anywhere here! There's got to be some better way to do this!!!"

Hibiki knew he couldn't ask Jura to do the same thing she had done to free his vanguard neither could he ask Dita as she and the other Dread pilots were still fighting it out with the Sand Vanguards while the Spartan was holding off the sand Copies of itself, and the process would take way too long, and time was running out for them.

The layers covering the mecha were too dense for such a plan anyway, he needed another solution and fast, he then recalled the Spartan's teachings about finding a solution in the least expected places.

/Think Hibikiâ€|there has to be an answer here somewhereâ€|wait a minute!\

He then spotted something resembling a massive storage tank near them. His Vanguard's sensors systems then detected a large concentration of gas that was a full sixty degrees cooler than the outside temperature. Just the thing he needed.

-----  
"One hundred and twenty seconds until detonation."

" Did you hear that?" Buzam cried out on the communicator.

-----  
"WE KNOW THAT ALREADY!"

Hibiki shouted back as he directed his attention to the storage tank. He then tossed his throwing energy sword to the side of the storage tank. The powerful impact from the weapon made the tank explode, unleashing the gas payload inside it into a cooling mist. The mist then covered the entire area, rapidly cooling everything in it's path.

At the same time the mist had completely frozen the circuitry of the force field emitters, disabling the barrier above them all.

"What the heck are you doing?! It's getting cold in here! I'm freezing!"

Jura complained as she was shivering from the sudden drop in temperature, but then she realized something.

"Wait a minuteâ€|?"

She looked through her monitor and saw that the Sand Vanguard she was fighting with earlier had suddenly stiffened and became brittle. In a second it broke into shards of sand. The mist spread out rapidly, turning all the remaining Sand Vanguard's into brittle statues that exploded immediately. The Sand Copies of the Spartan also froze up and were now exploding all over the place

"Good thinking there Hibiki." John-117 said as his Mark VI kept him warm.

"You're so smart Mr. Alien!" Dita cheered.

Barnette never wanted to admit it, but to her also, it had been a good idea.

Hibiki nodded at Dita's praise but he knew that now wasn't the time to be choosy. He then directed his attention to Meia's Vanguard. The sand that covered her mecha cracked and broke away, allowing the young Dread Leader to see daylight once more.

Inside her own machine, Meia had a deep scowl on her. To think that she now owed a man her lifeâ€| and to Hibiki no less.

She then tried to make her machine move, but it wasn't responding at all. She checked her readouts and saw that the sand had accomplished part of its objectives; it had completely drained her mecha of power. There was no chance of her to escape in time.

"The sand's drained my Vanguard of all power!!! I can't move."

"Hold on!"

Before Meia knew what was happening, the sounds of metal being brutally forced apart was heard. Outside, the Spartan had ran up to the fallen and free Vanguard and had began to punch into the Vanguard's armor and then took a good hold of the metal, he tore the armor off and then tore out the powerless parts and systemsâ€|and ripped the cockpit open using his enhanced strength and that of the boost given to it by the Mark VI. It didn't take very long for the Spartan to literally rip the Vanguard's cockpit wide open and show Meia to the others.

Hibiki and Ditaâ€|although having seen the Spartan's strength in action before were still in awe as the Spartan did the deed and got Meia out of her now powerless Vanguard as the Pelican landed near them. Jura and Barnette however stared wide eyed at what they had witnessed.

"Whoa! That guy sure is strong!!! He ripped the Vanguard cockpit open like he was opening a can of tomatoes!!!!"

Jura said with awe as she saw the Spartan's raw strength for the first time.

"That's guy's certainly something elseâ€|" Barnette said with a gulp.

Meia herself was shocked at seeing the Spartan rip her cockpit apart like a rapid and hungry wolf and when she was now face to face with the green armored giant of a man, and she saw her frightened reflection on his golden polarized visor. The Spartan noted that too but cared little for it and offered her his hand.

"Give me you're hand, I'm getting you out of here!"

"W-What?"

"We might not see eye to eye, but I will not leave a person in my side to die alone like this and in this place, if you want to live, give me you're hand."

-----

"Thirty seconds!"

"All units! Get out of there!!!"

-----

On the surfaceâ€|

"Hibiki, you and the others take off now!"

Hibiki was reluctant to leave behind his mentor but had no choice as he, Jura, Barnette, and Dita took off, using their rockets, and Meia was forced to follow the Spartan to the Pelican.

The trooper bay of the Pelican was open as the Spartan salvaged what he could from his soon to be abandoned supply canister and found pair of FURY Tac nukes and he quickly armed them for remote detonation as he and Meia were now onboard and he then turned to the holographic image of Cortana who piloted the Pelican.

"Seal the bay and punch it!"

"Got it Chief!!!"

Several more Sand Vanguards tried to get closer, but Cortana was able to punch the engines at full power and the Pelican left the sceneâ€|and with that, the Spartan remote detonated the FURY Tac nukes.

The surface of the planet where the ground was before was blown into glass as the Fury Tac nukes detonated. The Sand Vanguard's were also blown to bits as the Pelican rocketed up to the area of space meeting up with the Vanguard's as they all moved to get out of the area.

-----

"Time's up." Amarone replied as the countdown meter on her console reached a full zero.

On the bridge of the Nirvana, Magno and the rest of her crew watched with apprehension as the surface of the desert planet was engulfed in huge balls of fire and explosive force in orange-red color. Duero's medical monitors were showing nothing but static. There was a deep foreboding silence all over the ship, as the pirates feared for the worst. Then Duero's attention went back to the monitors as all five readouts displaying the landing party went back online as several objects broke out of the massive conflagrations that tore up the planet's surface.

"Three Vanguard's are accounted for, along with the Pelican Drop-ship." Ezra said with a mixture of relief and concern.

"Only four?" BC said with growing apprehension. "Which ones?"

"I count Dita, Jura, Hibiki, and Barnette's Vanguard's." Ezra replied.

"But where is Meia?"

They got their answer as Cortana smiled and replied.

"Meia's in the Pelican Drop-ship with John she's alive and safe."

The rest of the bridge personnel let off a collective sigh of relief as well. It was then that one of the bridge crew namely Belvedere announced that she had received some data from the investigation.

"Read it." BC ordered.

Belvedere became a bit tense, but nodded, with a little prodding from Buzam.

"Attention. This year's harvest includes red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, lymph products, etc. All blood products are in good condition. That's where the data ends."

The whole bridge personnel became shocked to the core by the information, even Cortana was stunned at the ramifications of the announcements. Magno looked down at the ground with a barely controlled anger. BC turned to her commanding officer.

"They can't really mean that!"

"I know BC, but the evidence is right here, and from what we have seen. Our enemies meant harvest completely. We're nothing but vegetables to them!" Magno then looked out to the stars and gave an

outraged look.

"

Whoever our new enemies, these aliens are. One thing is certain, they are quite formidable."

-----

In the hanger bay, the Vanguards minus Meia's Vanguard were now being sent back to dry dock, but Parfet had decided that the Vanguards were now to be repaired and maintained, in case the next battle would call for their use. With the aliens now stepping up their attacks to ground warfare, it was now going to be a growing possibility that they would be part of their forces.

The Spartan was also in the Hanger Bay talking to Hibiki and the young man was smiling and saluted the Spartan as the Master Chief commended him for his quick thinking and initiative. John-117 was happy that his lessons were working on Hibiki, and he hoped for more in the long run.

On several crates, were Dita and the others, namely Jura and Barnette, resting after their first taste of Vanguard combat. On another crate at another location sat Meia, who watched with a bit of anger at Hibiki and the Spartan.

/ Being saved by someone is bad enough. But being rescued by a man is a complete disgrace, let alone TWO men. And of all the men in this whole universe, I had to owe my life to THEM! \

Meia's thoughts were still on red light as she gazed at Hibiki and the Master Chief. Her pride was strong and right now it felt battered by the fact that she was still alive due to the young man's plans and the massive armored male soldier in front of her. Hibiki then noted her looks at him and the Master Chief then turned and was now gazing at her, along with the Spartan. She immediately tore her eyes away to look elsewhereâ€| anywhere but at them.

Hibiki sighed and glared at Meia.

"Man, what is her problem?!"

"Cool it Hibiki, fighting with her right now isn't going to change things."

"I know Chiefâ€|but she could at least be grateful and thank you and me, I mean, I came up with the idea of the freezing gas that freed her from the sand, and she should thank you for getting her out of the powered own Vanguard."

"It's all rightâ€|the thing that matters is we're all here."

"Yeahâ€|achooo!!!"

Hibiki then discovered that what he had done on the planet with the coolant gas tank had somehow given him a cold and he now had a runny nose.

"I think it's time to head off to the Medical Bay though, see you around Hibiki."

"Thank you Master Chief!"

Hibiki said as he saluted the Spartan once more and he was saluted back as the Spartan left the scene.

-----

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

"Pai check!"

Paiway was busy gathering new information, namely on Hibiki, John-117 and Meia. Despite being only eleven years old, the young nurse had the eye of a seasoned detective, though she had no experience on what she was seeing,

/ Something strange will happen soon, I just know it!\

She thought as she scribbled down her observations. It was then that Pyoro flew next to her.

"I guess I'll never truly understand humans."

"What would be the point of it all when you do?" Paiway asked the little machine.

"What's the point of you taking photos right now?"

"You're a mean robot."

"Shut up."

-----

Laterâ€¦

"You wanted to see me, captain?" Meia asked as she came into the conference room. She then noted that BC, and Duero were in the room as well.

"Yes Meia. There's something that I'd like to discuss with you. Please seat down."

The strong willed and fiercely independent girl became a bit tense as she then suspected on what she had been summoned for and the reason why. "Captain, if it's about what happened on the missionâ€¦"

"That's the exact reason why I called for you here." Magno said as she then took a deep breath. She knew that what was about to be said here would not suit well with the Dread Squadron Leader.

"This isn't easy for me to sayâ€¦ but I have no intention of beating around the bush. As the captain of this ship, my first and foremost priority is to the safety and well being of this crew. And as the Captain, I am forced to make some hard decisions." She then turned to Duero. "Doctor, what is your final analysis concerning this

matter?"

The Nirvana's healer and only qualified physician and his comrade, nodded to the captain as Duero then addressed Meia.

"I'm sorry to say this to you, but as the ship's head physician, I have declared you as psychologically unsuited to take part in any missions that involve the Vanguards. It is my sad duty to hereby permanently ground you from the Vanguards."

That naturally didn't suit well with the young pilot.

"What?!" Meia shot up from her seat and slammed both hands on the conference table. She immediately gave a hostile glare to Duero.

"You can't say that! I lead all combat missions for this ship! You are just a man! Who are you to say of what I can or cannot do?!"

"He happens to be our ship's doctor."

Magno replied sternly, but sighed silently as the reaction from Meia was expected, she motioned for Meia to sit down, which the young girl did so reluctantly.

"Captain! You can't be serious about this! He doesn't have any authority on the ship and he's just a man!"

"On the contrary, Meia. I happen to totally agree with him."

The aged woman said with her usual authority.

"And as I recall, I did make the official announcement that Duero, Hibiki, the Master Chief and Bart are part of this crew for the duration of this voyage. His analysis of your behavior during that mission coincides with something I had long suspected about you for some time."

"What are you talking about captain? I was just suffering from fatigue, that's all!"

Duero shook his head as he began to explain.

"You showed signs of agitation, nervousness, increased heart rate, hyperventilation, and increased lack of focus. You became indecisive and distraught. At one critical point of the mission, your entire body locked up and didn't respond. Those symptoms came up only when you entered the cockpit of a Vanguard. I also have extra data from the readouts from your time in the training simulator. You showed all the classic symptoms that indicate claustrophobia. It seems that you can't stand being placed in confined spaces, and that you panicked while inside the cockpit of a Vanguard. I had not wanted to speak about your condition since my words might not be heeded, but in light of what had happened on the surface of the planet, I have told the Captain of your case."

"Ridiculous!" Meia denied in a high voice.

"I'm not going to just sit here and listen to all that nonsense! I pilot a Dread better than anyone else here, so what makes you think



that I would have any trouble with a Vanguard?"

"Unlike the Vanguard of my home-planet, you're Dread's cockpit is more open and spacious in design, so it doesn't surprise me that you have excellent performance and feel more at home with a Dread."

"He's correct on that." Magno said quietly.

"What?! You're actually siding with thisâ€|thisâ€| man?!" Meia asked in shock at Magno.

"It's not a question of whether the doctor is either a man or a woman, Meia." Magno stated firmly.

"The fact of this matter is that Duero has far more medical training and experience than anyone else on this ship and he also raised a valid point, in which the safety of your fellow crewmates was affected. The Master Chief told me about you're condition after the operation and I could tell he was not happy with what you did. In fact both he and Hibiki worked together to save you."

Meia became silent at that statement and became angry how those two men had saved her and had gotten the others to safety. She had been upstaged once more by those men and now this male doctor informing her that she was unfit for combat! Why couldn't these men just go away? Things had been going on just fine before they came onboard!

Magno noted the girl's reaction.

"Meia, don't get the conclusion that we are turning against you. That's totally untrue. We are only thinking for your safety, and also for the safety of the crew. You are an outstanding Dread pilot and commanding officer, no one here will try to discredit or dispute that fact. Therefore you shall remain as the Dread teams' leader. However, both Buzam and I have already agreed that we couldn't afford to lose you if we were to send you out on another mission involving the Vanguards. Do you understand this?"

Meia took a long time to silently consider the captain's words. Finally, with a long sigh, she reluctantly nodded.

"I can already see that I'm not going to win this argument. All right then. So we just won't use the Vanguards any more, this was just the only time."

"I'm afraid that it's not going to be that simple Meiaâ€|the battle on the surface of the planet has told us that the aliens will no doubt have other traps on other worlds like that one and they will no doubt attack us not just in space, but from planets or worse. As it stands, we are going to form a new group of pirates who will be responsible for any operations that will not involve the Dreads directly or need to be done on a planet's surface, and in light of that, we have decided to appoint a ground team leader to handle such operations in the future.

"I seeâ€|"

Meia saw the logic there as the aliens would no doubt have more than

just this surprise for them, though it grated on her nerves that she couldn't lead all the combat operations of the pirates anymore.

"So who will be the ground team's commander? Will it be Jura or Barnette?"

Magno and Buzam sighed a bit as they knew the next announcement was not going to be very pleasing to Meia, but they had no choice, the decision was already made, in light of the events that happened during the battle on the planet's surface.

"Jura can pilot a Vanguard well enough and Barnette has good talent, but neither of them know how to lead a ground operation, and Jura's Dread also has the same ability to fuse with Hibiki's Vanguard, just as you're and Dita's as well, and those are our best tactical weapons in space battles with the aliens, thus they are not allowed to be the ground commander. Besidesâ€¦you already know who the leader is."

Meia was confused at firstâ€¦and then it dawned on her and she was wide eyed.

"You can't mean you're all going to put HIM in charge of the ground teams?!"

"He is already selected Meia, he has the training, the experience, the knowledge and the skills to lead a ground force in battleâ€¦his leadership in the ground mission proves that he is the best candidate for the position of ground operations leader. His battle records also showed to us that he has earned all of his military awards and his reputation as well. He is also the leader of his entire unit of fellow soldiers. The Master Chief IS the best candidate that we have at this point of time."

-----

In the UNSC sectionâ€¦

"You want me to lead the ground teams Captain?"

The Spartan asked as he and Cortana looked at the Captain as she had journeyed to the section with Buzam along with her and Gascogne as well. The Spartan was a bit surprised at the arrival as he was busy checking his Mark VI for any damages, while the suits were nearly invincible, including the Paeksis enhanced Mark VIâ€¦the Spartan leader, like all his fellow Spartans didn't take any chances and always checked and tripled checked their gear before and after a mission.

"That the long and short version of it. Do you want the position?"

"The position isn't the problem Captainâ€¦but I do have a problem with the idea."

"Oh?"

"Captainâ€¦I mean no disrespect, but while you're crew are skilled in their own right, they are still civilians in my eyes and they are not yet in the standards of even UNSC Marine recruits, they don't have

what it takes to be in the ground teams as of yet. They still need to be trained in basic military discipline, team work and more."

"I understand that, but you can train them, am I correct?"

"Yes I can."

"So what is the problem Master Chief?"

"They are still in the belief that men are their enemy, will they listen to my orders, as well as follow my orders? I don't want teams that don't listen to commands given by me if they think I am the enemy."

"They will, they are a good crew and they will know that this arrangement is for the best, and out of all the people here, you are the best one qualified for the job."

The Spartan thought about it and sighed a bit, he knew the truth in Magno's statement, and considering that what they had gone through would no doubt be a prelude to more dangers to come, he decided that he might as well train the pirates under his leadership so they can survive the dangers they would no doubt face soon.

"Very well Captain, I'll do it—when do I start?"

Magno smiled and so did Gascogne and Buzam, they were relieved that the Spartan had agreed to train some of their crew to fight ground missions that were of key importance to their return back home.

"You can start once the recruits are chosen Master Chief."

-----

Later—

The Spartan was walking to the Bio-Park to think a bit more on his latest decision and as he arrived, he spotted Meia who quickly glared at him as he was dressed in Marine fatigues and bare of his Mark VI. He walked over to the Megele female and Meia then spoke to him in a rather unfriendly tone.

"What are you doing here?"

The Spartan shrugged and replied.

"To think."

"Yeah right, you're probably here to gloat, aren't you?"

"Why should I be gloating?"

"Don't lie to me! You were probably happy to be given the post of ground team commander, that's your line of specialty after all, not to mention you're happy that I'm not allowed to be part of the ground teams!"

"The Captain did offer me the position, and I accepted it, I know the need for it."

"Hah! I knew it!"

"I didn't come here to gloat about that, I am taking the position not for any glory, I'm doing it because it is necessary and it needs to be done. I will work with everyone to make sure that we all make it out of the alien's traps safely, including working with you."

"Are you deaf?! I don't want help from anyone, least of all someone who's a freak like you!!!"

Meia then realized what she said and despite her dislike for the Spartan she knew that her tongue had gone too far, and she had already seen what the Spartan was capable of doing and her insult might have made him angry enough to do the same thing that he did to the Vanguard to her.

However, this was not the first time the Master Chief had been called a freak by other people and he shrugged it off and replied.

"I understand you're dislike Meia, but I doubt our alien enemies care for that, to them, we're all vegetables to be harvested. In a way, this reminds me of the time the Covenant came and nearly wiped out all humanity for the sake of their religion."

He then looked at Meia and spoke calmly and with seriousness.

"In truth, you're not the first one to call me a freakâ€¦I've been called that and worse in my world, but I don't care at all. I have a mission to accomplish and I will do what I can to get the job done, but I do respect you Meia."

"What did you say?!"

"There's another reason I didn't want you on the ground mission, you have the skills of a great pilot, and I said I will not contest you're place as leader of the Dread Squadrons. To have you die there would have been a waste of your life and your skills, not to mention the suffering and grief you're death would place on the crew. I have seen death many times over in the nearly three decades of war that I have been in Meia, and I know that every life is to be saved and not wasted. If you were to die nowâ€¦how would the Dread pilots fight? They rely on you to lead them, and you are part of their family. Losing you would be a serious blow to them."

"And I have seen enough death to last me a life-timeâ€¦and I have lost many of my fellow Spartans and friends in the wars I have ever fought in. I didn't lie when I said that I will not lose anyone from my side anymore. Regardless of how you feel about me being on this ship and on this crewâ€¦I want you to know that if you are ever in grave dangerâ€¦I will rescue youâ€¦even if I am the only one to do it."

With that, the Spartan left the Bio-Park and left a speechless Dread pilot to ponder his words.

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

Author's notes:

Well, that about wraps up this latest chapter nicely and I will be taking a break for a bit as I need to rest as I have been plagued by headaches for quite a bit recently and as such I will update a new chapter once I feel much better.

And on the topic of pairings with the Master Chief, like I said before, there will be other candidates to come and they will be shown soon enough in the coming chapters, but don't forget, Cortana still has a very strong lead over the pack as she and the Master Chief are very close, and now that she is a human being, it certainly raises the chances that she will be at the top for getting the Spartan. Let's not also forget that despite his nature, the Spartan does have feelings for Cortana, though he hardly shows them. But he proves it true as he had gone into the now corrupted Flood Hive that was once High Clarity in Halo 3 to rescue her, even if there was a very big chance that it was a Flood trap for them all.

But since we're still going strong here, the other candidates may get their chances as well to get closer to the Spartan, so if you have some pairing suggestions for the Spartan apart from Cortana, please send them over to me, but be civil about it.

So how was this one chapter? Not too bad as the Spartan shows his stuff on ground battles, and it seems that despite Meia's hostility towards the Master Chief, he would still help her out in the event she will need some support for any venture that she might be involved in. Will that announcement change Meia's opinions towards the men including Hibiki and the Master Chief?

We'll just have to wait and see won't we?

And now it appears that the pirates are forming a new ground strike force to handle mission where the Dreads will not be helpful and it seems that the Spartan will be the overall commander of the operations. This means that he will not be only responsible for ship defense when he's onboard the Nirvana, but he will be the leader for the ground operations that the pirates will be taking part of. This is his element to start with as he is the best in both ship and ground based battles. For that we will have a filler chapter next so as to highlight the newly created pirate ground teams.

However, will the women be able to work with the Spartan? Will they be willing to listen to his orders once they are in a mission? And better yet how will they feel now that they will be given the same UNSC Marine training and discipline that Hibiki was subjected to in the last chapter?

Here's a little trailer for you to see:

-----

The three women couldn't believe what they had just heard from their new commanding officer, they had just managed to finished the obstacle course and rang the bell, or one of them did as the others followed. They had thought that with one of their team members ringing the bell ahead of the others, they would win and have a good meal at dinner time but now they were stunned with what the man said.

"What do you mean we lost and can't have dinner?!"

"I said the first team to ring the bell gets to have the lavish dinner, you didn't make it as a team to ring the bell."

"But that's unfair!!! I rang the bell ahead of the others for my team?!" One of the women complained.

Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 replied.

"You're team loses, you loseâ€|you don't win until you're team wins."

-----

See you on the next Chapter! Chapter 6 â€" Camp Genesis!!!

(Made some needed changes due to getting more information.)

## 7. Chapter 7

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: Bungie owns Halo, GONZO owns VanDreadâ€|I own neither so I am just a writer after all.

## Chapter 6

### Camp Genesis

/ \: Thoughts

-----

In the UNSC Section of the Nirvanaâ€|

The Spartan was busy running through the current inventory of weapons that the manufacturing facilities on the ship had been able to make, along with the newest stack of supplies, munitions, weapons, parts, and more. He was supposed to be seeing the brand new recruits that the Captain, Buzam, and Gascogne had selected to be his team members in both ship[ defense and ground combat operations for the coming battles with the aliens, that they all had dubbed the Harvesters, namely for this massive operation that they had begun.

Cortana had analyzed all the data that she had been given and determined that the Harvesters would no doubt have hit other planets such as the one they had just left only a day or two before and due to the dangers of this trip, the Captain had given him a time table to train the women under his command as best he could.

Suffice to say, the Spartan was less than pleased with the time table he had been given by the Captain. It took years to train UNSC Marines, Army and Navy, the procedures were tough and very much demanding on the recruits, and even he and his fellow Spartans had to train for nearly eight years in UNSC Marine tactics, maneuvers, strategy, formation, discipline, and more in order to be used to the life that they were about to step into. He was now going to have to

train civilians to become soldiers, and that was not an easy thingâ€|not to mention the fact that he had a limited time table to do it all in.

The Spartan sighed as he finished his run through of the inventories and made his way to the planning hall and there, he would wait for the new recruits that would form the core force of the pirates' ground forces. On his back was his trade-mark MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and an M6g Magnum Sidearm pistol, and sure enough, as he stood there, in came Cortana, Buzam, Magno, Gascogneâ€|and his new batch of recruits.

Ever since he agreed to be the ground team leader, he had insisted that only women with considerable combat experience were to be part of the ground teams, as such, only those who were from the security teams made the majority of the teams, along with some of the women from the Register, and a small number from the Dread teams were selected by the Spartan, he made sure to inform the Captain that he wanted only the best of the best as we from her crew, he was not here to get people to train them into shapeâ€|they had to already be IN shape or they would be rejected and replaced when he saw them.

His methods might sound harsh, but the methods could very well lead to the survival of the teams and their victory in the battle-field or their lossâ€|anything and everything can go wrong in the battle-fieldâ€|and from his long years in the Wars, they usually doâ€|and he could tell that as they all walked into the room, none of the women before him had ever in their lives tasted ground combatâ€|making this project seem even more dubious than before. But he had to do it either way, and so he put that out of his mind and waited for the women to take their seats.

In the meantime, the women were not very happy with the fact that they were now going to be under the command of a man, even more so when they found out that their new commanding officer was none other than the Spartan himself. A good portion of them had heard about the time he had been the one to repel the Harvester forces that had attempted to board the ship when it was still being transformed by the Paeksis and many of them were not very comfortable with the fact that they would have to work with someone like this man before them, they had also seen him when he was not wearing the helmet and considered him to be like a ghost due to his ghostly pale white skin, and others considered him more machine than manâ€|and therefore, it was not surprising that some of them were whispering among themselves on what the Spartan was, and when they took their seats, they looked at him with wary eyes.

As the Spartan scanned them all, he noted their looks at him and he put that all into account and considered it normal as he had been treated far worse back then in the past by the people who mistrusted him. The Orbital Drop Shock Troopers were the worst, calling him and his fellow Spartans as freaks due to an incident where he had killed three ODSs in a fight by himself and he was still fresh from his own augmentations on Reach, that branded them all as freaks then, but he put that aside as he focused on what he had to do.

As soon as the women were in their chairs, he saluted both Magno and Buzam as they came in front of their crew. While this was going on, the Spartan did a quick head count and found that he was going to have at least forty-two women under his command, just enough for at

least six large-scale fire-teams in UNSC terms and could also form one platoon.

The UNSC Marines were deployed in various formations to accomplish missions, and the Fire Teams were the smallest they could get to and the most effective in special missions where too many people would attract unneeded attention from the enemy, along with incurring heavy and unneeded casualties and losses, along with the need for tactical flexibility.

He planned to train them in UNSC tactics and infantry doctrine in order to make them more capable in a ground fight, but for today, he was going to introduce them to the basic military operations they would have to be handling once they were on the surface of a planet. He had made a request that once a suitable world that could support human life was found, then he could begin training of the ground teams as quickly as he could.

Magno then spoke to the crew once they were now fully seated and had their attention squarely on her and Buzam, while Cortana and the Master Chief stood nearby.

"As all of you have no doubt found out, you have all been selected to become our group's teams for ground operations. These operations are to be undertaken when the operations are against the operational parameters of the Dreads and therefore will not be undertaken by Dread pilots. This means that Meia will not be you're commanding officer on such missions. The officers and I have already had a conference and discussed that matter and have placed the position of ground operations leader to the Master Chiefâ€|Spartan John-117."

"The reason for this is that out of all the members of this ship, he has the skills, experience, training, and leadership talents to lead ground combat operations. This, along with his performance on the ground mission with the Vanguard's a few days prior to this day has also served to assure us that he is the best officer for such operations. As you might have or have not learned, he is not from Tarak, so he does not see women as the enemy, but that is not an excuse to go against his orders when he is training you for you're new roles as a ground force for the ship. The floor is you're Master Chief."

With that, the elderly Captain stepped aside and allowed the Spartan to face his new band of recruits, the Spartan was not the kind of man who wanted to be in the lime-light and decided to make his words brief and to the point. To him, the sooner he gets this done, the better off the ship will be.

"I will be training you all in UNSC Marine tactics and operational procedures once a training camp has been established. I will not lie to you about the dangers of ground combat operations, they are dangerous and death will be a constant companion for each and every last one of you, so you will have to be able to follow orders and to take the initiative once you are in the battle. I will form you into a fire team of seven team members each and you will have to learn how to fight as a team in order to accomplish you're missions and objectives with as much skill as possibleâ€|but make no mistake that you will have to undergo intense physical training before you will be allowed to be part of a fire teamâ€|only those who can prove



themselves can be in the fire teams. Any questions?"

One woman raised her hand and stood up and she spoke with a slightly sullen tone.

"Are we supposed to use the Vanguards?"

The Spartan looked the woman and answered.

"If the situation calls for the need to pilot the Vanguards, then the answer is yes. However, the majority of you're operations will be in the use of UNSC weapons, equipment, and vehicles. You will be receiving instructions on their use soon enough once a planet is selected for the set-up of our training camp. For today you can take it easy, but as soon as a planet is sighted and it is suitableâ€¦then the training begins. Any other questions?"

-----

At the backâ€¦

"Oh manâ€¦the women are now going to under the Master Chief's command?"

Hibiki said as he looked at the numbers women who were currently asking the Spartan questions on their new roles and it amazed the young Tarak teen at how calm the Spartan was as some of the women began to ask questions that were not part of the discussion and no doubt had done so to test their new commanding officer.

His temper was getting hotter at the comments but he decided to emulate his mentor's calm and patience and restrained shouting at the women, and he didn't have to react as the Captain and the Commander along with Gascogne gave the women a fair warning on what they were saying to the Spartan, and the women relented. The Tarak teen however knew that if the women thought they were going to have it easy with the Spartanâ€¦then they had no idea just how wrong their perceptions of the Spartan wereâ€¦he knew his was when he agreed to be under the Spartan's tutelage, but he learned quite a lot since then and sure enough, he had gotten used to the training and despite complaining at times of the physical pain he hadâ€¦he admitted that the lessons really helped in toughening him up as a man.

"So I've heard, but the reasoning for the formation of the ground teams is pretty sound Hibiki and the Spartan is by far the most obvious candidate for the operationsâ€¦don't tell me you don't approve?"

Duero asked his fellow Tarak teen as he and Bart were also in the room with the Vanguard pilot as they looked at the events. The Tarak medic was very much in approval at the formation of the ground teams and with the Spartan in the lead, he had no doubts about how effective the ground teams would be.

"Maybe I don't totally approve, but I know that it's really important for the ground teams, yet I still can't help but wonder if the Master Chief will be able to work with the women, they are not very easy to get along with."

"Trueâ€¦but you know his answer to that very well Hibiki."

Hibiki chuckled at that

"That I do"

"Mr. Alien!!!"

"Ah Geez, what now?!"

Hibiki turned and there came Dita carrying something in her hands and just as the redhead arrived, he looked at her latest item and it was yet another lunch box, only a bit larger than before with that, his frown disappeared and was replaced with a smile as Dita handed him the box with her usual happy go lucky smile.

"Wow thank you!"

"You're welcome Mr. Alien!!! I figured you could use some good breakfast today since you'll be training with Mr. Green Alien."

Hibiki nodded and unwrapped the cloth-covered lunch box and dug into the food once more much to Duero's curiosity and Bart's horror.

As the young Tarak Vanguard pilot ate the food at a rapid pace, Dita then noted the number of women in the UNSC section and was somewhat surprised to see her fellow pirates all the way here, usually it was only her, Mr. Alien, Cortana, Mr. Green Alien, the Captain, the Commander, and Buzam as well. She looked and spotted the elderly woman and her second in command as the Spartan answered a few more questions while the two officers, along with Cortana watch on.

"What's going here Mr. Alien?"

Hibiki managed to swallow the egg roll he was eating and swallow the rest of his food and answered the young Megele girl when he was sure that he won't choke on his food. The young man decided to eat his food well so as to enjoy the wonderful tastes that the food placed on his taste buds, as soon as he was sure that he won't choke, he answered the redhead's question.

"You're comrades are supposed to be part of the new ground operations team. The Master Chief's the one who's going to be the commander of the group."

"Really?"

"Yep this stuff is great food don't you guys want some?"

Hibiki asked as he showed the large lunch box filled with food to both Duero and Bart. Both had very different reactions to the offer. Duero was the more polite in terms of reply to the question as he shook his head and smiled somewhat.

"I'm sorry, but I have some duties to perform in the Medical Bay, so I'll have to pass for today Hibiki."

Bart on the other hand was still recalling the time he had nearly had his tongue burned into a lump of charred meat by the doctored fillet

mignon that Barnette had tried to foist on Hibiki on the Vanguard mission several days before. And due to the fact that he was not aware of the fact that this meal was not made by Barnette, he quickly assumed that all food made by women were like the one he had tried.

"N-N-No thank you!!! I'veâ€|I've got to go and practice in the Navigation Well!!!"

With that, the blonde Tarak left the area and left behind the two who looked at him with some confusion as he seemed to be trying to run away from a massive monster that was nipping at his heels.

"Sheesh, they have no idea what they are missing."

With that, Hibiki took in the rest of the food as Dita watched him once more with a blissfully happy expression. The Tarak teen knew that in a few hours from now, he would once more be sweating his body off in training with the Spartan, but he was going to enjoy it as best he couldâ€|though he was still annoyed by some of the things Dita did, namely calling him Mr. Alien all the time.

-----

Laterâ€|

"101...102â€|103â€|104â€|105â€|106â€|107â€|108â€|109â€|110."

Hibiki was once more wearing only his Tarak body suit as he continued his pushups under the calm gaze of the Spartan, the young teen used to complain but after days to weeks of constant training, the young man was more or less getting used to the harsh but needed training the Spartan wanted from him.

The Spartan gazed at his young charge and decided that now was the right time to provide Hibiki a gift for his hard work, something that could help ensure that young man would be strong and alive in the various missions to come.

He and Cortana had watched Hibiki and decided to have something specially made for him and Cortana was very proud of the achievement, considering Hibiki's small frame and still short height. The Spartan also admitted that the gift was a bit much, but it was both meaningful and practical as well for the kinds of battles the young man would no doubt find himself inâ€|though he would only be able to carry one type of weapon.

"Hibiki!"

The young Tarak lad stopped his pushups and ran up to the Spartan and saluted the Master Chief.

"Yes Master Chief?"

"I have something for you, come with me."

The two went over to a nearby locker and the Spartan then took out a set of newly manufactured Marine Body Armor, the armor comprised of a chest and back plate vest, shoulder plates, elbow pads, upper arm

pads, thigh pads, greaves, and knee pads as well. The armor was in the color of deep black in the same color scheme as Hibiki's Tarak body suit. He then faced Hibiki and gave him the set and told him what it was and who it was meant for.

"This is UNSC Marine Body Armor that I and Cortana made for you personally, it's made from special ceramics along with lightweight titanium alloy, so it can resist ballistics and some level of energy weapons fire. They weigh a bit but you're physical training should more than make up for that. Think of this as both a gift and a means of protection for you when you go out on a mission." (+)

Hibiki was in awe as he looked at the body armor set that he had been given, and as soon as he began to place on the armor and strap himself in with all the parts, he was surprised to find a snug and comfortable fit on the armor to his body. The armor was a bit heavy, but he found that his training for the past few weeks certainly came in handy in dealing with the weight, and his trained muscles and stamina allowed him to move in the armor very well on his own with little difficulty. He looked at the Spartan and though he couldn't see through the golden polarized visor, he felt that the Spartan was smiling—just a bit at his nearly childish awe at his own personal set of body armor.

He then saluted the Spartan and spoke with pride as well.

"Thank you Master Chief!"

"Good, carry on with you're training."

With that, the young man went back to his training, happy with the suit of protective armor and vowed to continue his training to make himself worthy of the gift the Master Chief and Cortana had made for him specifically. He decided to see if he could manage to complete his remaining four hundred ninety pushups with his new armor on. He knew that it was going to be very tough on his body, but if he could do this before, then the armor would certainly be another way to test himself as a man of Tarak and being under the Spartan's wing.

-----

In the bridge—

"We're coming over the planet right now Captain."

Magno and Buzam looked at the planet and were impressed at the sight. It seemed to resemble Earth in looks and topography. The captain then spoke to the bridge crew to monitor planetary conditions and to determine if the planet was habitable by human standards. Celtic, Belvedere, Ezra, and Amarone scanned the planet and as they did so, the information became available for the crew to look at, along with Cortana herself.

"The planet appears to have a very sustainable atmosphere for human beings Captain, there is a mix of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, the kind of mix needed to allow human life to exist, there are at least two large continents on the surface with connecting land bridges as well between them, and there appears to be mixture of environments as well. There seems to be no sign of human habitation on the surface of

the planet Captain, no signs of habitation and construction on the continents."

"Hmmâ€¦it is rather odd that such a world is not inhabitedâ€¦Are there any signs at all of possible battles on the surface?"

"I'm afraid not Captain, this world appears to be totally intact and un-colonized."

Buzam looked the world over and noted that the world would be perfect for the Spartan to begin the training for the ground teams. She knew that the time constraints that the Spartan had on his hands to train the women meant that the sooner the women could be trained, then they would be ready for the combat operations that needed them to be in the fore-front of the fighting.

"This world appears to be ideal for the training of the ground teams Captain, if it will be all right with Cortana and yourself, I could give authorization for the Master Chief to establish a training camp for the ground teams here on this world?"

The AI and the elderly woman looked the world over and decided that with the time that they had, they would have little choice in the matter and both agreed.

"All right then, Cortana, tell the Master Chief that we have located a planet that will serve him as a training base for the ground

-----

The Spartan nodded as several Pelicans with ammunition/supply canisters were getting ready to depart, along with several other Pelicans that were carrying a variety of vehicles and had them all securely latched on the Pelicans, including the various variants of the M12 vehicle or known to all UNSC personnel as the Warthog. The Warthog got it's nickname due to the tusk like protrusions on the front of it's hood and near the tow winch line and was one of the most versatile vehicles in the UNSC arsenals and all the Marines he knew loved this vehicle. It had seats for both the driver and the passenger who rode shotgun for the vehicle, and the gunner was on the rear as well.

The Pelicans that carried the vehicles has the M12 Warthog LRV or the Light Reconnaissance Vehicle which was armed with the M41 Light Anti-Aircraft Gun on it's back, and while the M41 was used to hit aircraft, it proved to be very effective against infantry and even vehiclesâ€¦making this variant the most versatile of the M12 series.

The second variant was the M12G1 Warthog LAAV, designed to replace the M12A1 Warthog LAAV that was armed with the 102mm SC-HE Rocket Turret. This variant was armed with a smaller version of the MAC Guns used on all UNSC ships, the faster firing M68 Gauss Cannon, which could do the same thing as the previous weapon system, but had a faster rate of fire, allowing it to be deadlier to infantry.

The next variant was also the M831 TT Warthog, which was not armed with any turret but had four side facing seats on the back and had a roll cage to protect the passengers on the rearâ€¦it relied on the

passengers to provide it with offensive and defensive abilities as it lacked a turret weapons system. While that would seem a disadvantage to first timers, it nevertheless proved handy in transporting personnel quickly in and out of the battle zone.

The Pelicans also carried the M274 ULATV, or affectionately named the Mongoose. The vehicle was not armed with any form of defensive and offensive systems and was naturally dubbed as an engine on wheels and while it appeared useless, unwieldy and difficult to control, and slowing down in one in a fierce firefight was suicidal, it was perfect for speed and could carry two people, a driver and a passenger who could serve as a weapons specialist. He knew how useful the Mongoose was when he and the UNSC Marines used a group of them to take out a Scarab on the continent of East Africa.

And the last vehicle to be brought by the Pelicans was a small handful of the M808 Scorpion Battle Tank, also shortly known as the Scorpion and was the main battle tank for the UNSC. The high density tungsten round of the main 90mm High Velocity Cannon could be deadly to any foe it was able to hit and the coaxial AP-T 7.62 machine gun made it deadly to infantry as well. The muzzle break on the main cannon allowed the recoil to be lesser so as to allow the tank to recover quickly, that and the armor and lesser reload time made this tank a needed part of the UNSC arsenals, though it was still vulnerable to anti-vehicle weapons, other vehicles and anti-tank infantry formation tactics.

The other Pelicans carried other supplies, including new crates of Marine Body Armor sets, fatigues, equipment and more, along with supplies such as rations, medical kits, stim-packs, dermacortic steroids, narcolytic metabolase, data crystal chips, camouflage cloaks, helmets and helmet recorder, security systems, emergency food preparation dispensers, replacement transmissions for the Warthogs, PG000E portable electricity generators, machine guns, along barrels of water, hydrogen and more. He also made sure that they had COM systems with them, namely SQUADCOM, FLEETCOM 7, TACCOM, SATCOM, and the ever present E-BAND. He also had Chatters, small portable PDAs brought in with the rest of the supplies, however, he made sure that they were all heavily encrypted to lessen the risk of enemy forces infiltrating their comm.-frequencies and giving away tactical data, along with the data-pads, along with a good stock of NAV Tracker Markers for exercises, recorder chips, and a newly modified IFF tag system that Cortana had made so as to negate the need for the women to be implanted with neural interface implants, and fiber optic probes, he also made sure to have Falcon Wing parachutes added to the supply lists.

He also included extra building materials into the supply lists, namely instacrete for building bunkers and underground facilities. The substance was easy to store and quick to shape and build and dried quickly, he and included sections of high grade Titanium A Armor for more protection. He also included Spoofers to train the women on how to hack and bypass security doors and systems that were either locked down, damaged, or unable to function for any reason.

The training of demolition teams and specialists was a must so good stocks of Thermite Paste was included in the lists, along with a good amount of C-7 Foaming explosives, C-12 Shaped Charges in their normal forms and their damage pack form, M383C Linear Shaped Charge

Demolition Kits, Napalm Grenades, Satchel Charges, Smoke Grenades, Fragmentation Grenades, Sonic Grenades, Thermite Carbon Cord he even took some dummy Lotus Anti-Tank mines. The mines were naturally much weaker and made to be none lethal for training purposes for the ground teams.

As soon as he was done with the lists, he was called by Cortana through a nearby holo-tank that showed in her new human sized form. Apparently when Cortana needed to talk to him but could not leave the bridge for any reason, she was able to move her AI form through the communications links to the UNSC section.

"Cortana?"

"I wanted to tell you that I've been rather busy with some new weapons based on the Covenant weapons schematics I had on hand when I was still in the Covenant Holy City, there wasn't much for me to do then, apart from evading the Gravemind. I can have the manufacturing plants make them as well, just in the same way I was able to make the Gravity hammer that I added into you're arsenals on that mission before."

"That's good to hear, how long with it take?"

"A couple of weeks as far as I can figure. though I think it would be better that we keep those weapons in reserve for now. the women have their own laser rifles so they can use those until we can equip them with the new Covenant weapons, the sad part is I can't make any method to replace the batteries on some of the weapons, but I can make a recharger for them instead, until I come up with a better solution."

The Spartan nodded and went to work as he boarded the Albatross Drop-Ship. Apart from the Pelicans, the Albatross was another drop-ship class used by the UNSC, but instead of dropping small teams of units as the Pelican does, the Albatross could carry UNSC forces, vehicles, and supplies en masse. He could have used the Albatross instead of a large group of Pelicans, but the Albatross could also serve as a forward Command Center and that was the reason he had this ship with him for this operation.

As the ship took off from the main hanger of the UNSC section of the Nirvana, he was informed of the deployment of the pirates' own shuttle to ferry the chosen recruits down to the surface of the planet. Cortana had been able to send out several new COMSATS for them to use while they were there. She also made sure to send out at least two Clarion Spy drones to keep an eye on things while the training was going on. The last thing the Spartan needed was the enemy showing just when he was busy training the recruits and get them in serious danger.

-----

On the Nirvana

The crew were currently bidding their comrades good luck as they were now getting ready for their first days in training for the fire teams under the Spartan's command. Many of them still resented the idea of being forced to follow a man's orders, and some of them planned to give the Spartan the hard time, than the other way around. As they

took whatever they could bring to help make their situations a lot more bearable. They boarded the shuttles and then the ship moved out.

As she watched her fellow crew members leave for the surface of the planet, Meia couldn't help but wonder how they would fare under the training of the Spartan, she recalled what she had seen nearly a few weeks ago after the ship had been boarded by the Harvesters and their ground forces, and what the Spartan had done to the alien forces. She couldn't help but feel even more frustrated that her position of pirate operations commander being cut in half, she was not going to go against the formation of a ground operations force, but the fact that she was not in command of the ground force made it a bit hard on her. She knew that considering what she had seen and heard about, the Spartan was by far the very best choice for such missions, but it was not going to be easy for her.

"Do you think they'll be all right with him being in command Meia?"

Meia turned to see Jura and Barnette, along with Dita as the three of them walked over to see the fleet of transports head off to the uninhabited planet below to set up a training camp. She shook her head and sighed as they looked at the Pelicans and the Albatross drop-ships that were already ahead of the Megele shuttle, and they knew that the Spartan would be in any of the transports as well.

"I don't know, but I don't think it will be easy."

"You're rightâ€|but how will that Spartan be able to command the others?"

The blonde asked her Dread team leader as Barnette gave a snort.

"I know they'll be fine, they're pirates after all and women of Megele, they can handle what that man can throw at them."

"You want to bet on that?"

The women turned and spotted Hibiki Tokai with his new body armor on as the young Tarak youth walked towards them. Dita smiled at Hibiki and rushed over to greet him and he merely nodded at the redhead's greetings, but did smile slightly at her as well. The Tarak youth then looked towards the small fleet leaving for the planet below and couldn't help but smirk a bit as he thought back about his first days with the Spartan and what he had learned under the Spartan for the past few weeks, and the gift he had been given for his efforts, and he was wearing already, proud of his gift from the Spartan and hoping to put it to good use in the days to come.

Dita looked at the black Marine Body Armor and wondered what it was.

"What is this Mr. Alien?"

"Something that the Master Chief made for me."

Hibiki said with a bit of pride and Dita's eyes widened at the meaning of that.



"Is this really alien armor?!"

Hibiki couldn't help but groan a bit at that and replied.

"No it's not alien armor, it's Marine Body Armor, the Master Chief gave it as a gift, that's all, and I plan to use it well."

The women sighed a bit and Barnette merely snorted and spoke to the young man.

"Our fellow pirates are not weak you knowâ€|they can handle what that man can dish out."

Hibiki snorted and replied.

"I thought the same thing, but when I was training with the Master Chief, he had me lifting weights that ranged from 90 to 100 pounds for four hours each day, do 600 pushups in an hour each day and run twelve times around the training room before I could even eat or drinkâ€|and I've been doing that for a long number of weeks, ever since I moved in with him in the UNSC section. But you're commander Meia already knew that, she saw me doing the same things on my first dayâ€|isn't that right?"

The Tarak teen said with a look at Meia and the Megele girl knew the truth in that statement, having seen Hibiki undergo the said training before.

"I did see you do all that before, though only at the pushups."

Hibiki nodded and looked at the planet below as the ships began to enter the atmosphere. The Tarak teen then smirked a bit and looked at the women before him and replied.

"At least now you have an idea of what you're fellow women are going to go through once they are under his command. And from what he told me about the women in his side in the UNSC, and it is that compared to the women in the UNSC Marines and the ODSTs, I think that you're fellow pirates will be in for one hell of a first few days."

-----

On the surfaceâ€|

The large open field area where the Pelicans were busy dropping off supplies and equipment was very much filled with grasslands and clumps of trees, a very ideal place for a settlement to be established. And it didn't take long for Cortana, who controlled all the Pelicans to release what was left of the supplies and vehicles, as soon as she, or rather her extensions were done with the ferrying of supplies, she went on to handle the rest of the remaining duties back on the ship. She however did leave a few of the Pelicans in the new base in order to be used in the training exercises that the Spartan would no doubt put the women through.

The Megele women were next to leave their shuttle as it dropped them off and headed back to the Nirvana, they then found themselves in the vast areas and smiled as they saw the woodlands, the mountains, and

the hills as wellâ€the place reminded them of Megele greatly, and they were in the mood to wander around a bit as there were several rivers nearby. However, their explorations were cut short as the Albatross landed and out came the Spartan with his weapons already in his hands. He then called them over and they arrived to face him and he gave them the first order of the day.

"Time to begin construction of your shelters for tonight."

"What?!"

The women were not liking the fact that there were no support construction robots which they used to build their shelters and were not in the mood to be sweating and doing a lot of physical labor. The Spartan was not liking this attitude in the very least. They were close to failing their very first test, and that was to discard their vanities and get the jobs done. In his time as a Spartan, he and his fellow Spartans were always told to get the jobs done before anything else, and he knew that to be true. This was an unknown world, and while there were no visible dangers, that hardly meant that there were none to begin with.

"Unless you want to be bare of any shelter for tonight, I suggest you get to assembling your new residences today."

The women realized quickly that the Spartan was not someone they could reason with and sullenly got to their work. Thankfully, the prefabricated components of the cubicles were easy enough to assemble and while they were sweating, the Spartan acted as security on the camp as the women set up the place. He watched them intently and corrected any of them if they made any mistakes with the Cubicle assembly. And it took a better part of the day for at least forty two rows of cubicles to be established, each row were at least on the side of the Albatross as the massive drop ship served as the main head-quarters of the newly established camp.

The women thought that they were done with the Cubicles and could now do what they wanted, but that was not the case as the Spartan then ordered them to get ready for some real construction work in their new camp as of right nowâ€they were going to have to set up the walls, bunkers, the armories, the training yard, the landing pad, and the vehicle storage yards before the day was to end.

The women were even more stunned at that as the Spartans brought out the needed tools and the containers filled with instacrete. And despite their still loud protests, the Spartan's calm and serious gazes at them told them that negotiations were not going to work with him. He was their commander now and if they wanted to take a break, then they were going to have to earn it and soon. With that, they went to work and the Spartan made them work real hard.

The bunkers were naturally placed in regular intervals around the base and also had quick access to the entrances/exits to allow the women quick access to both the bunkers and the base itself, the women had to dig their way to the ground at least six to seven feet deep with stairs and filled the floor with instacrete and had sections of Titanium A Armor Plating on them to further make them stronger against possible attack.

The walls by far were the easiest to make and the Spartan made sure that the walls were at least five feet thick and at least fifteen feet high, and had stairs for the women to rush up to them just in case. The instacrete was impressive as it rapidly hardened and became very solid in only a matter of hours. As it did so, the Spartan and a handful of women placed sheets of Titanium A Armor plating into the rapidly drying instacrete to make them even more resistant to possible attacks. The walls were in the shape of an octagon with four entrances/exits and had indeed taken the better part of the morning and the women were very much tired and exhausted.

As soon as the walls were done and fully hardened, with the sections of Titanium A Armor plating fully integrated into the fully hard and dry instacrete, the Spartan then directed the construction of a training yard area with the supplies on instacrete and when that was done, he allowed the Megele recruits to have their lunch and the women ate their food ravenously while he had his own lunch from his rations of rice with beans, bacon, chicken loaf, and some protein bars. As he finished his meal and took a drink of cold water, he scanned the works on the walls and nodded as there were no mistakes so far in the construction process. As soon as the women had ate their fill, he told them to begin construction of the vehicle storage yards and they would have to dig a large bunker and there, the vehicles would be stored, they had to do so and it was natural that by the time they were able to put in the instacrete and make the massive storage hanger that housed several of the Warthogs, Mongooses and the Scorpions, they were already very tired and filthy, but the work was far from done.

They then had to construct the armories and when that was done, they had to haul all the needed gear and equipment into it, including the weapons, ammunition, explosives, medical supplies, barrels, and moreâ€|though the Spartan personally handled the C-12 Shaped Chargers due to their highly volatile nature and kept them in a very special armory. Once that was done, the landing pad was done for the shuttles and the Spartan handled placing the Pelicans in their respective locations for use. And they were then told to construct the mess hall for them to eat in, and lastly, they had to divert a large portion of the river's cool water and to put it in a massive constructed reservoir for use in the showers. By the time all this was done, the women were dead tired and covered in sweat and grimeâ€|and naturally, they were NOT happy with that.

The Spartan had done part in the construction workâ€|due to his high grade strength, he handled the materials that were too heavy for the women to handle and with that, or were too dangerous such as the C-12 Shaped Charges and more of the dangerous explosives. He gave his last set of orders for today and that was the setup of lighting systems, portable power generators, and their base defenses that included motion sensors, IR scanners, IFF scanners, the AIE-486H Heavy Machine Guns were then placed at the bunkers by the Spartan and at the sides and angles of the walls to provide maximum cover and protection for the base, and the portable generators also provided power to the lights that were established all over the place to keep it lightedâ€|along with other systems that would be needed, namely heaters, shower systems, and re-chargers as well.

By the time the camp was done, the women were about to collapse and had to work together to get into the mess halls and were finally able to eat their food and get their drinks. The Spartan could only watch

as they gorged themselves on their food and drinks, and he merely waited for them to finish and when they were, he decided to get their attention.

"All right, the camp's already done so for tonight you all can get yourself cleaned up in the showers. Tomorrow, we are going to get down to the real training."

The women hardly complained but groaned loudly as they were dead tired. They managed to haul themselves out of the mess hall that they had helped construct and make their way to the showers and took long cool baths to ease their muscles and as soon as they entered their cubicles and on their bunks, they quickly fell asleep and were now out cold. However, they began to think that after all the things they did today, nothing could rival the stuff they had to do.

They had no idea just how wrong they wereâ€¦as the whole construction work they had just done was nothing more than a way for the Spartan to test them, and while he was slightly impressed, he was far from impressed as they still had to go through the basic physical training before they actually get down to the tough and serious basics.

-----

The next dayâ€¦

The women were all sleeping and trying to get used to the exhaustion they felt, and thankfully the still early morning air was cool like the air-conditioned air back on the Nirvana, and the forest scent certainly made things a heck of a lot more tolerable for them. However they had no idea that a certain someone was about to give them their first taste of training and he planned to wake them up gentlyâ€¦

With a VERY special alarm clockâ€¦

John-117 nodded as he ran through his setup once more and found no slip-ups and decided to get the plan underway as he took out his MA5C IWC Assault Rifle and loaded it with blanks and took out a detonatorâ€¦and pressed the trigger.

Near each cubicle a safe distance away and not in harmful range of each cubicle occupant was a special sonic grenade that he had primed to go off when he pressed the detonator. The Sonic Grenade was nonlethal in the sense that it didn't send out fragments and shrapnel, unlike the normal Fragmentation Grenade that the Spartans and the UNSC Armed Force were known for using, and were naturally used in training exercises by Drill Instructors, or DIs, and was a way to teach Marines to always keep their eyes open.

The results were explosive as the sonic booms went off and the women naturally woke up screaming and disoriented and rushed out of their cubicles still in their underwear. The women were totally not expecting this and were naturally milling around barely had enough time to react to the other sounds the Master Chief created as he activated alarm klaxons all over the place with flashing red lights all over the base and then he fired his Assault Rifle into the air. That, plus the incessant screaming from their comrades, the sounds of alarms, and the milling bodies had the women totally lost and they

rushed towards the training yard as it was the only fully lighted area in the whole camp

Chaos reigned supreme in the camp as the recruits milled towards the yard still dressed in their undies

As soon as the women arrived, the wailing sirens stopped and they began to get their bearings straight. They then looked to see the Spartan looking at them with a very calm and emotionless look.

"That was sloppy."

The women glared at the Spartan and they all shouted at him.

"ARE YOU INSANE?!?!?!?"

"ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL US?!?!?!?"

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!?!?!?"

"WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING?!?!?!?!?"

The Spartan didn't react in the least and allowed the women to vent out their anger and when they were finally too tired to shout he merely replied back to them in the same calm and emotionless manner.

"This is merely you're first day when you are in the battle-field on the ground, you do NOT have the luxury of uninterrupted sleep. You're enemies on the ground don't care about you're beauty sleep, they will do anything and everything to kill you that includes finding ways to use you're time of falling asleep to their advantage. You keep one eye and one ear open at ALL times because if you don't you're next night of sleep could very well be you're last night in the land of the living is that clear?"

The women were still not very happy with what had just happened and quite a number of them were considering quitting the program and going back to the Nirvana but it seemed the Spartan already knew what they had in mind and replied calmly.

"If any of you want to leave and head back to the Nirvana, then you'll have to prove to me that you have what it takes to be in this outfit. You may have been selected by the Commander and the Captain for the ground teams, but as of today, I am the one you have to prove yourselves to and if you do prove yourselves, then good. Besides that, the Pelicans and the Albatross have operation codes that only Cortana can unlock and she is up there on the Nirvana and only under my orders will she allow those ships to be space travel worthy. The only way you go back to the Nirvana is to prove yourselves to me is that clear?"

The women were getting even more angry and decided to do their best to prove that they have what it took to take what this man could dish out at them. The Spartan could see that as well and decided that now that they were awake, he decided to give some time to get dressed into their fatigues, no way was he going to let them do all their training in their undergarments anyway, it would be awkward, distracting, and uncomfortable to begin with.

The women were not liking the idea of not getting dressed in their clothes and also for the lack of time putting their usual round of make-up on, but the Spartan was having none of it and told them firmly to get dressed in the proper military fatigues for the exercises. While he had nothing against them dressing up in their normal clothes, the clothes they had with them were not meant for combat and would become a dangerous way for enemy forces to spot them. The fatigues were better suited for this world and he had more than enough uniform fatigues in storage for their training in the various environments that he could tell this planet had on it.

The women looked at the woodland colored uniforms with some distaste, but since it was getting even colder outside, they had no choice and found that the clothes were very much comfortable enough and offered good protection from the cold air. As soon as they were fully dressed and were now back in the yard the Spartan began their training, and in no time flat, the women realized just how difficult an instructor the Spartan was.

The women were subjected to pushups, sit-ups, crunches, jumping jacks, weight lifting, running laps, relay races, obstacle courses and more for the duration of the early morning and suffice to say, even with the cool air, they were sweating once more and panting as well, so it was hardly surprising that some of the women were too tired to keep up. The Spartan noted that and told them to grab some water and when they were done to get back at it. He had awakened them at exactly 3:00 in the morning and he made sure to train them until 7:30 in the morning—when the sun came up, the women were covered head to toe in sweat and he decided that it was time for chow.

He told them to rest and grab breakfast and when they did, they found themselves getting food from the Emergency Food Preparation Stations that the Spartan had brought along. They had been disgusted with the idea that food would be nothing but bland meals, but to their surprise, the food was good in taste, textures, and warmth. UNSC Food Preparation was very good in the 26th Century that even their MREs were like gourmet meals at times and did very well to keep soldiers fully fed.

The Spartan took off his helmet and ate with the women, showing to them that while he was their commanding officer, he was still part of the unit and wasn't in the mood to take a desk job. The women noted that and they decided to keep this up and prove to the Spartan that they were strong and better.

The Spartan then started classes on UNSC Marine tactics, military strategy, unit cohesion, and Fire Team tactics, along with lessons in proper weapon usage and maintenance, vehicle usage and repairs, combat maneuvers, strategy, emergency first aid, field medical training and healing methods, base and team security, communications security and more. He made sure that the women each had a chatter unit and a data-pad to work with on these classes and just as he was strict towards Hibiki on the Tarak teen's days with him, he was strict to the women as well, anyone he caught trying to sleep was told to stand up for the duration of the classes until he said otherwise, and if the disturbance was a bit of a higher degree—they were forced to do sit-ups, pushups, and crunches until they were told otherwise by the Spartan.

Needless to say—the other women were not keen on getting the

Spartan's attention directed at them and kept their attention solely on his lessons as he used a large holo-tank to showcase each lesson to them as they sat in a large semi-circular class room with chairs and a massive ceiling of instacrete above them.

By the end of the classes, they went back to physical training and conditioning for the rest of the day since the Spartan planned to test them in other ways as well. And he already knew of one exercise that stressed team work among teams very well—he should know—he had taken that same exercise with Sam and Kelly.

As the women continued to train under his orders, they watched as he began to set up and brand new obstacle course for them to try. And as soon as it was done, the Spartan told them to get back into afternoon classes and they did so.

As the classes continued, the Spartan made sure to check just in case some of the women got the bright idea of sleeping again and sure enough, a few of them were caught and had to either stand or do the exercises, but the Spartan wasn't going to kill them with excessive training as he allowed the women to rest periodically as well. They had their lunch and then continued their physical exercises and then the Spartan presented them with their newest test—

The very same one that he and the other Spartans had taken in their youth on Reach, and the one he had failed previously when he was still not into team work with his comrades at the time, Kelly and Sam. The obstacle course that he personally assembled comprised of ropes, beams, bridges, bars that rose up to the top where a bell was located. The only way to finish the course was to reach the top and ring the bell.

"All right ladies, front and center!!!!"

The women moved towards the Spartan and did so in still somewhat disorganized groups, though he quickly fixed that problem. As soon as everything was in order, the Spartan explained this new test for them all in a very simple fashion.

"The first team to ring the bell on top of this obstacles course gets to have a lavish meal, the team who is last—will not eat tonight. I will have the keys to the Mess hall and only the first team will have the lavish dinner, the rest can eat—except the last team. Now pair up in teams of three and get moving."

The women quickly went to work and formed three women teams quickly scaled the obstacle course, but the Spartan certainly made it challenging as the day wore on as the pirates tried their very best to navigate the complex web of beams, ropes, and bridges, and it was not surprising that a considerable number of the three women teams to be struggling hard to make it to the top. Some of the women were going ahead of the others in their teams and the Spartan quickly took note of them and made sure to keep a sharp eye on them as they scaled the obstacle course. While others apparently got the idea and worked as a team to make it to the top of the structure.

As the day wore on, several of the women were able to ring the bell, but they had done so ahead of their fellow team members, that meant that out of the fourteen women teams that took the course, only four teams were going to be eating tonight as they had worked well as

teams to reach the goal. The Spartan waited as the women completed the course and were now in front of him and they were very much exhausted for their first day, and he knew that as soon as he announced that only four teams were going to be allowed to eat their dinners, the others would be very angry at that.

And sure enough, a large number of the other ten teams were stunned and appalled at the announcement while the other four teams were surprised, as they were among the last to ring the bell. The Spartan took the four teams to the mess halls and allowed them to eat, and then faced the others as they were looking at him with stunned hatred, only one team however had the energy to stand up and face the Spartan and air out their grievances.

"How dare you?! We were among the first to ring the bell before the others, but we're the last to finish and get no food?! What kind of sick joke is this?!"

The other women took to that remark and they quickly got the energy to shout that the Spartan who was still unmoved by their words and even though some of them were too tired and attacking the Spartan when he was in full armor was very foolish, they tried to reach the Spartan and attack him, but the Spartan merely sidestepped their efforts and let them stew for a moment and spoke.

"The objective was to ring the bell as a team, which means that in order to win you have start as a team and you end as a team."

The Spartan looked at the women with a calm and unshakable glare and spoke once more to them and made it clear to them that they had failed the obstacle course all because they had no concept of working as a team when it came to the missions they had to be in.

"You're team loses, you lose, you don't win until you're teams wins."

Later, the women were dead beat tired and more than a large number of them were already going to sleep without any dinner tonight, and were left to think about what the Spartan had said and yet they were too tired to get ready for their next day. The Spartan let them rest as he planned the next batch of activities for them to take part in.

-----

The next dayâ€¦

In one section of the lands outside of the camp, the women were hard at workâ€¦

"Do you see anything?"

One of the pirates asked as she carried her laser rifle in her hands as she and her fire team were currently hiding in a nearby embankment and were on field exercises for today as the Spartan had now passed them through their routine of early morning exercises once more and made sure to use another approach that had him using sonic and flash grenades to wake them up once moreâ€¦ further adding more woe to the women recruits who tried to sleep past the early time. The Spartan trained them from 3:00 to 8:00 and allowed them to have their



break-fast and a few minutes of rest before they were once more in the classes and afterwards, he announced for them to get ready for field exercises, where they were going to put their lessons and knowledge to the test and he made it clear that they were going to have to recall everything in these exams.

"I don't knowâ€|all this foliage is really a mess."

"The sweat's making me itchâ€|."

"Hey, let's get moving already, there's not much happening out here."

The women then moved out and they were in an open field of grass and bushes, the area looked serene, but that was not to last as the ground exploded around them, they were rendered deaf by the sounds of sonic grenades exploding and were sent into a panic and fell to the ground covering their ears and they were blinded by smoke grenades going off. As the sounds and the smoke died down, they were left stunned and disoriented on the ground and it took quite a bit before they were able to get their bearings.

"What happened?"

"I don't knowâ€|"

The others in the fire team were still moaning and groaning until they all looked to see the Spartan looking at them with his own MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle in his hands. The Spartan shook his head and looked at the fire team leader to called her team out of the embankment.

"You're out as a fire team leader for today."

"Why?!" The woman asked as she got to her feet along with the others.

"You just led you're entire fire team into a mine field and got them all killed, and if there were survivors, the opposing force would have found them and either killed them all or took them prisoner, that's why."

The women were being tested fiercely by the Spartan on how to operate in various environments and whatever conditions they found themselves in. And the women were going through a lot as they were told to wear Marine Body Armor for the duration of the exercises and they were not very comfortable with the idea of wearing the armor, which in their opinion was drab, ugly and heavy. But the Spartan was not budging on the matter and told them to wear it. And their exercises included crawling through the mud to avoid simulated weapons fire on top of their heads along with simulated artillery barrages as well, along with walking in cold hip deep waters with their weapons in their arms, moving through the woodlands in the thick and damp air around them, along with moving through thick underbrush as well, and jungles with lots of unwanted company of the insect persuasion.

Along with learning how to move through such places, the Spartan made it clear that they had to keep their eyes open as he simulated different ambushes and the outcomes as well. He made sure to have them set their laser weapons on stun and when he equipped them with

UNSC weapons, he made sure that they were armed with blanks and laser pointers. The women were learning quickly that while the weapons of their home-world were more advanced than that of the Tarak military, they were far more delicate and needed considerable maintenance in such battlegrounds as the ones they were currently fighting in, and it was a danger for them to rely on them exclusively as the weapons began to malfunction. When they did, the Spartan gave them UNSC weapons.

And the women discovered that while the weapons were indeed only using projectiles, they were very well suited for the various environments they were currently in. The UNSC made sure that the weapons they had in their arsenals could operate in any environment that their forces found themselves in and made them highly resistant to moisture, sand, dust, mud, ice—everything that the battle-field could throw at them, and while they still needed maintenance, the weapons were easier to repair and maintain than their laser rifles. UNSC weapons were not as advanced as that of the Covenant, and truth be told, the Sangheili would rather die than use UNSC weapons as they considered them to be worthless and too barbaric and primitive. The Arbiter however, and several other Elites had learned that UNSC weapons were very effective in their own rights and when in the right hands, could even outpace their own weapons—which was why the Arbiter had issued UNSC weapons to his kin when they and the UNSC were mounting a desperate gambit assault to the Ark to stop the Prophet of Truth from activating the Ark and firing the Halo Rings.

When the women were taking breaks and eating their rations at lunch time and listening to the Spartan as he gave them lectures on field operations and combat doctrine, the Spartan made sure to show them in practical situations how each lesson would apply, and he made sure that when they did the same thing, they did it right, and he was a very strict person to them.

The Spartan also took the time to seek out who were better suited as the NCOs for the Fire Teams and made sure to observe them as they continued their exercises under his watch to make sure that only those who showed good potential were the ones that he would test well to make sure that they had what it took to lead their respective fire teams. He took a look at his data files and came up with the names of possible candidates for the NCOs.

Later, he then taught them how to operate in urban environments as he had used the stocks of instacrete to build ruins to simulate various towns and cities, along with installations and told the women that not all of their battles would be limited to the outside and there would be times that they would have to go into urban environments. The women learned how to move in and out of the simulated ruins and how to use the Fiber Optical Probes on their Body Armor to look at corners to avoid ambushes and to see if they were near the objectives as they were told to use their helmets and the HUDS to accomplish their missions. The Spartan taught them how to rescue others in such locations, how to find the best vantage points and how to use the locations to their advantage, how to set up and avoid ambushes in urban environments.

It was also here that he introduced them to the use of explosives in their demolition course, this was on how to use explosives for a variety of operations that needed them and he decided to give them a

very important lesson with explosives as he took out a block of C-12 Shaped Charge and made it into a cube about 4x4x4 and when all the women were in position in front of a massive five story building made from instacrete, the Spartan began his lecture on the most dangerous of the UNSC non-nuclear explosives.

"This is C-12 Shaped Charge, this is by far the most volatile and most dangerous of the UNSC explosives you will be working with in the near future, this can be used as a weapon as well, but is primarily used in heavy demolitions work. You can use a cube such as this one to level a tall complex like the one I am about to blow up with this one cube."

The women looked at the tiny cube and laughed out loud and one of them commented at the Spartan.

"How can that tiny cube destroy an entire building?!"

The Spartan merely shrugged and decided to go ahead with the demonstration and used the remote detonator to the cube and took it into the building and when he was done, he ordered the women back a good distance away and he then told them to watch as he would detonate the cube. The women snorted and were not going to believe that one tiny cube could blow up the building.

Their thoughts died a horrible death as the explosion ripped the building to shreds and forced them all to duck behind the walls of the urban training section area ruins as large to small chunks of destroyed instacrete were sent flying about. As soon as the explosion died down, the women looked and gulped loudly as the entire complex was not only blown to bits, but was totally flattened inside a deep crater.

The Spartan looked at their expressions and felt a slight shiver of satisfaction as he knew that the lesson was driven across

"You were saying? And just so you know, C-12 can be placed in medium sized backpacks that are called Damage Packs—two of those contain enough C-12 to rip apart three meters worth of Titanium A. You'll be working with those soon enough—for today, we get down to the other types of explosives."

The rest of the day apart from their usual training and physical exercises were dedicated to learning the various ways UNSC explosives such as C-7 Foaming Explosive, M383C Demolition Kits, Satchel Charges, Thermite Carbon Cord, Smoke Grenades, Sonic Grenades, Napalm Grenades, and Fragmentation Grenades were used. The Spartan told them to never use nuclear based UNSC explosives, only he will deal with that.

As soon as they were back in Camp Genesis, the Spartan once more tested the women on the same obstacle course as last night and to his satisfaction only two teams were unable to finish, while the others did well. The women apparently were learning the value of team work for them to be a good force. The next day was going to be dedicated to the other methods of war for ground operations and that included the use of vehicles and heavy weapons. This also was the time that he would request the training of medical corpsmen in the fire teams and decided to make a call to the Nirvana soon.

As soon as they were done eating and cleaned up, the Spartan gave them a quick medical checkup as his Mark VI allowed him to monitor their vital signs well enough and he was satisfied that all of them were still healthy and in good physical condition.

-----

The next dayâ€¦|

The women were once more awakened at 3:00 by the Spartan and were once more back into training until 8:00, and that was when they grabbed their chow for breakfast and while they had not been able to use their makeup, they looked healthy enough and were slowly but surely getting used to the routine and managed to form up in an organized fashion despite the Spartan's use of blank rounds and artillery simulators. And while there were still those that complained about the activities, the women were adapting and were already showing an increase to their stamina, muscle mass, strength and reflexes, but not yet enough to satisfy the Spartan.

As soon as they were done with break-fast, the Spartan took them through their classes once more and like before, he made sure to keep an eye on anyone falling asleep in his classes and when there were none sleeping so far, he made sure to give them some time to rest before he had them suit up and get ready to train with the vehicles and took them to the vehicle storage yards and began to show the women just how to use the Warthogs, the Mongooses, and the Scorpions. He called Cortana and had her power up the Pelicans and he and the women helped secure the vehicles and they were air-lifted into the training area outside of the camp.

Once that was done, the Spartan wasted little time and showed the women how to drive the Warthogs and how use the Warthogs' versatility to the best of their natural ability and the women were naturally confused at driving the Warthogs as they had never used one like this before and they were still rather clumsy at the actions of driving. The women had to struggle very hard on how to use the Warthogs for the rest of the day and all the way up to lunch. They ate and when they finally got the hang of driving the Warthogs, they began to get better, though they were still very much novices compared to the way the Spartan used one when he showed them how to move with the Warthog at high speed around the course and to see the Warthog at high speed began to show to the women how versatile this vehicle was in the hands of experienced users such as their commander. As they began to try again, the Spartan then told them to use the Warthogs that had their turrets on and when the women on the turrets began to get better with the Gauss Cannon and the M41, the Spartan told them to try moving and shooting at the same time and the women thought that he had lost his mind, but as they were able to take out the targets he had erected, the women began to see how effective the vehicles were when moving and firing their main weapons at the very same time. M41 rounds smashed into the instacrete targets as the LRV type Warthogs did their rounds and left large lines of holes in them, and Gauss Rounds smashed chunks off the targets as the women slowly but surely began to get used to the techniques of driving and shooting at the same time.

They then worked with the Troop Transport Warthog and learned for to shoot from the passenger sides of all the Warthogs with some level of accuracy and then they were allowed to drive the Mongooses, though

they had to be very careful of the speed and acceleration of the ATVs but had to admit that the speed was handy in certain situations. Then they tried the Scorpion was impressed by the sheer fire power of the UNSC Marines' MBT and it's own heavy armor and weapon systems for all out assault.

The Spartan then decided to see how the women would be able to operate using all the vehicles and allowed them to drive the Warthogs, the Mongoose and the MBTs, and he made sure to be there to administer any medical treatment to the injured. Thankfully there were no fatalities and critical injuries, but he knew better than to hope that it would last forever so he decided at in a few more days, the Tarak medic will be called upon to handle the medical cases here in the training of the women so they would not be injured at this state.

As soon as they were back at the Camp and were ready, he sent them into the same obstacle course and they did well for all of them to warrant dinner, and as soon as they were done eating he made sure to give them extra sleeping time as they cleaned themselves up and went to sleep. The Spartan made sure to call the Nirvana and get Duero down here to the base.

-----

The next dayâ€|

"Are you sure you wish to go as well?"

Duero asked Hibiki as the Tarak medic was getting ready to be joined by Magno and Buzam, along with Gascogne as the officers wanted to see just how the women were doing in their first few days. Naturally they were not alone as Barnette, Meia, Jura, and Dita came along to see the progress of the women under the Spartan's command.

The Tarak teen nodded with enthusiasm.

"Of course I am! Do you think I would miss this for the world?"

The others looked as the Tarak teen came onboard and was still garbed in his Marine Body Armor in the black scheme and he quickly took a seat in the Megele shuttle. The captain sighed and nodded for the pilot to get going to the surface. The Captain wondered how the women were doing under the Spartan's commands and so was Buzam, they still had their reservations on the matter but decided to see things for themselves.

Meia wanted to see just how well did the Spartan lead his teams into combat to see if he was indeed the right person to lead the ground teams. Jura wanted to see just how things were on the surface, Dita wanted to see how Mr. Green Alien was doing, Barnette, well she was going to see just how good a leader John-117 was as well.

Later, as they arrived at the sight of the Camp and were guided by Cortana who kept an eye on things on the bridge on the Nirvana to the surface on the landing padâ€|they were surprised to see the women doing their usual military exercises at the early morning and as the ship landed, the Spartan appeared, carrying his Assault Rifle and called the women over and all of them stopped their exercises, whether it was weight lifting, running, pushups, crunches, and the

latest addition to the list, hand to hand combat, and rushed to the landing pad to greet the Captain.

As the elderly woman was greeted by the women under the Spartan's command, she noted how different they looked; they were tired and sweating and wore no make-up. Back on Megele, they would have been considered as plain or weird, but it seemed that they were getting used to it at least to a degree. She smiled at them and promised to look over their situations at a much later date as she greeted the Spartan.

"Nice to see you down here ma'am."

John-117 said with a salute as the Captain greeted her as well. The Spartan then got back into business and called the women in to have breakfast and then to have their classes. The women under his command hustled to it, already aware of the punishments that awaited them if they tried to be either absent or sleeping in class. They ate their food in the mess hall and then when that was done, they trooped to the class for a review of their lessons from before and new ones on advanced vehicle combat maneuvers and vehicular urban combat. Along with urban combat maneuvers on foot and holding defensive positions.

The Spartan made sure to let the women take the day off from training for today, he knew that despite their coming cooperation, the women would no doubt have complaints about his methods to the Captain and the sooner those were aired out, the better off he was going to be so he could get back to training them for the soon to come ground missions. He then dismissed the class and told them to talk to the Captain inside the Albatross Hanger and let them have some time alone while he talked with Duero and asked the Tarak medic to begin training the women on first aid and medical corpsman training.

The women naturally complained to Magno about how harsh the Spartan was and how much they had to go through in order for them to even take a break. They followed his orders well enough, but he was very much completely different from anyone they knew—even Meia and Barnette were appalled by what they had heard about the Spartan's training methods.

"Captain—if he keeps this up, the ground teams will be too tired to keep fighting."

"That's right! We can't let him keep this up, you should replace him!"

Magno noted that and knew that while Meia and Barnette meant well, they were unaware of why the Spartan was considered the best for this mission and she decided to tell them about the records that Cortana had shown them, but before she did so, she decided to speak in the Spartan's defense.

"I understand why you feel this way, all of you. But the Spartan is the leader of the ground operations forces and I have given him the authority to do what he can to teach you all how to fight on the ground."

"But captain—"

"Let me finishâ€¦I have read all of his records and I have seen his records as well. He is by far the best officer to lead the ground teams without exceptionâ€¦many of you might not know this, but the Spartan is no ordinary foe to face, I can say with absolute certainty that compared to him, even the best commandos of our world of Megele would have little chance to take him head on by themselvesâ€¦let alone the types of enemies he has fought with in his dimension for nearly 30 years."

Magno then looked to Buzam and nodded as the Commander knew that it was time for the women under the Spartan's command to see their commanding officer in action against both the Flood and the Covenant. The elderly woman activated one of the viewing spheres that they used and sure enough, all of the Spartan's records and videos were shown, including the number of awards he had won over the years.

Seeing the Spartan's immense strength for themselves when they were on this planet made the women understand how capable he was, but to see him perform those tests that Duero had placed on him including his fighting ability, reflexes, speed, and running ability made them realize that he had actually been holding back all of his abilities for their sakeâ€¦not to appear cool or superior, but for their own safety and well being. They realized that of the Spartan was going all out on them, they would have been beaten to the point of overwhelming physical exhaustion. They also learned of the augmentations he had been subjected to as a child and it was very unnerving for them all to hear about it, thankfully Hibiki and Dita were not in the room as they were hanging out with the Spartan. The women gulped as they were told about all the risks involved with the augmentation procedures and were amazed that the Spartan had survived them all without complications.

It was when they saw the records of every major battle the Spartan had been in that really got their attention.

Barnette, Jura, and Meia gulped as they saw the Covenant for the first time in their lives and saw just how dangerous these aliens were in the lines of combat as they watched through the eyes of the Spartan or rather the helmet recorders of the Spartan's Mjolnir Armor how deadly and powerful the aliens were, they watched as the Sangheili were seen, the Unggoy, Lekgolo, the Kig-Yar, the Yanme'e, and the Jiralhanae were waging war on the UNSC and how brutal these warriors were. They saw the Covenant burn worlds into glass and how their forces spared no one in their quest to exterminate humanity on the Master Chief's dimension. They saw how the Spartan fought with these races for nearly 30 years and won countless times, even in the face of overwhelming and horrifying odds to come out on top every time.

To know that the Spartan who was their commander right now had survived so many battles and pulled victory out from the jaws of death in all those battles for nearly 30 years made the women of the ground teams, including Meia, Jura, and Barnette realize that this man did know more about ground warfare than any of them and it showed them just why the Captain had selected him personally to be the ships' combat specialist and assigned him to the security teams, along with being the overall commander of the newly created ground forces. If he had been able to face off against such brutal foes for so long and earned the title of Demon among them for his many victories and the defeats of nearly legions of their forces by

himself, then it was not surprising that he had won all those military awards.

The women even held their breath as they saw the Flood for the first time and saw just how vile and dangerous the parasitic race were as they consumed and corrupted all that they touched like a plague and what they did to living and dead creatures was enough to make the women nearly lose all the contents of their stomachs at the sight. The battles that the Spartan was in were truly the proof that silenced the complaints the women had about their commanding officer.

As the records ended, the Captain looked at the women who were stunned and then they looked to see the Spartan training Hibiki who showed his respect and awe of the Spartan openly as the young man followed the Spartan's advice on how to fight and looked at Dita who smiled at the Spartan and Hibiki, apparently even Duero decided to learn a thing or two from the Spartan as well. The Spartan showed Hibiki some moves in CQC or Close Quarters Combat that the young man was able to grasp and put into practice.

Magno then looked at her crew and replied.

"All of those records you all saw are real and living proof as to why the Spartan is the leader of the ground teams in the Nirvana. That youngster in the black armor used to be like you all, and he didn't like the Spartan, but after seeing the same records and deciding to learn from him, the young boy's changing because of that man. He knows warfare on the surface of planets and since you are under his command, then you will need to listen and show him respect, because considering that we are facing the Harvesters and we have no idea of what they will throw at us, you will learn quite a lot from him and his long years of experience."

With that, the elderly woman, along with Gascogne and Buzam left the women to ponder her words and what they had seen from the records as they went to talk to the Spartan about extending the training for several more weeks before they moved on to their journey to return back to Tarak and Megele.

The ones chosen for the ground teams then began to talk to themselves about what they should do now.

-----

The next dayâ€¦

John-117 looked at the women as they were already fully dressed in their uniforms and in proper formation. He had just gone out early to set up their alarm clock when the women were already awake and waiting for him in the training yard. He looked them over and noted that they were looking to be a lot more determined than he last recalled them to be. He decided to test them a bit and see their reactions to what he planned for them. Magno, Buzam, Gascogne, Hibiki, Jura, Meia, Dita, and Duero were given quarters in the Albatross as they decided to stay for a while to see the Spartan and his ground teams in action.

"A little early today aren't we?"



"Yes sir!"

The women replied in unison as they waited for the Spartan to speak, and the Spartan did speak to them in a very serious tone.

"Today your captain has allowed me to train you for a few more weeks before we leave this camp and head back our way to Tarak and Megele. If any one of you are still not willing to continue, then tell me now and you can take the Megele shuttle back to the ship, I won't hold it against any of you, you've done enough for the past few days to show me you have what it takes, all you have to do is take one step backwards. If any of you wish to remain in the Fire Teamsâ€¦ know that the days you have just had are merely the beginning and more of the training will continue, I will push you to the limits of what you can do and then someâ€¦ because you will need the training if you are to survive the battles that will come your wayâ€¦ if any of you are willing to take this risk and continue training, then take one stepâ€¦"

All the women took one step forward and showed to the Spartan that they were ready for whatever challenge he would put before them.

"â€¦forward. Very well then, we begin nowâ€¦ all recruits fall in for training!"

"Yes sir!"

With that, the women got into their routine of exercises as Magno and Buzam looked on, the officers were awake and they couldn't help but smile as the women under Spartan's command showed that they were not going to back down and prove that they had what it took to be in the ground operations teams. Magno sighed and repliedâ€¦

"Now we will see if they will be able to prove themselves."

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

-----

(+) â€" Hibiki's new personal body armor is in the same design as that of the UNSC Marines and in the color scheme of ODST Armor Body Suit.

-----

Author's notes:

Well, this wraps up this chapter for today and it will be just the beginning as the Master Chief will be able to train them even further in the coming chapters. The women are still newbies so don't expect them to have it easy in the battles to come.

And to prove that, the women are about to have their very first taste of battle on the next chapter which is a filler before we get down to the next chapter. That is correct, the ground teams are about to have their very first taste of ground combat and this will be at a very

high profile of a target for the Harvesters. I won't say what sort of installation it is, but it is a deadly threat to the Nirvana and cannot be easily destroyedâ€|except by ground assault and there will be very high resistance at the installation, but if they do not take it out, then the pirates will be doomed.

How will the pirates under the Spartan's command handle the mission that awaits them? We shall see in the next chapter.

Here's a trailerâ€|

-----

In the UNSC section of the Nirvanaâ€|

As the Spartan finished his outline of the mission to the ground teams, he looked at them all as they were now fully suited up and wearing their Marine Body Armor. He knew that by all rights, they were still not ready, but the pirates had no choice, unless this installation was taken out, there would be no end to the dangers that will before the Nirvana and the others, but he made it clear to the females that what they were about to walk into was no longer an exerciseâ€|but was the real thing.

"Make no mistake about this, you will not be going down to a deserted planet, you will be going to a planet occupied by the enemy."

The women and their NCOs listened in, knowing that considering the serious tone the Spartan spoke in, things were very serious.

"We have no idea how much of the Harvesters are down there to protect the installation, but considering the tactical and strategic value of the installation, you can expect the resistance to be high. And this time, you will be facing the enemy you have been training for the past two months to fight."

He then loaded his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle with a fresh clip, but this time with live rounds, showing how serious this battle was going to be once they hit the ground to the women. And his next words made that painfully clear to them.

"The rounds and energy weapons fire that we will be encountering will not be set to stun, or blanksâ€|but they are live and will kill on contact. This is no training exerciseâ€|this is the real thing."

He then turned to the NCOs who would lead the fire teams and he spoke to them.

"The lives of your respective fire team members are in your hands, as you're lives are in theirs and each other. Do what you can to lead them to victory and survive, do not ever leave anyone behind, is that clear?"

"Yes sir!!!"

The Master Chief nodded as he gave the order to the Fire Teams, just as the Dreads and Hibiki's Vanguard were getting ready to fly alongside the Longsword Fighters under Cortana's control to provide covering support for the Albatross that they will be riding in.

"ALL FIRE TEAMS!!! GET READY TO GO PLANETSIDE!!!!"

-----

See you in Chapter 7 Baptism of Fire and Steel!

## 8. Chapter 8

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: Bungie own Halo and everything in the universe, and GONZO owns VanDread and everything in it. I naturally own neither so don't think I'm making any money out of this story.

### Chapter 7

#### Baptism of Fire and Steel

( ): Thoughts

-----

The sounds of weapons fire was heard in the UNSC section of the Nirvana as several of the women chosen to be part of the ground combat operations forces under the Spartan's command were busy in the shooting range and getting their skills into sharpness and to keep themselves on edge.

The Spartan was also among them as they were busy test firing their UNSC weapons so as to keep the feel of the weapons in their hands and the methods of operation of the weapons fresh in their minds, the last thing the Spartan wanted them to do was forget all those lessons when the time came for them to get down and fight in a ground mission.

John-117 checked his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and reloaded a fresh clip into the weapon and then got up from his kneeling position and walked to inspect the female pirates under his command to see their weapons proficiency and as far as he could tell, they each had good promise as the women continued to shoot the targets. The Spartan then looked over the names of his selected NCOs to lead the ground teams in whatever missions that required them to head down into the battle-field, they had proven that they were better in some respects to the others and had some leadership skills that could help them in leading their respective fire teams.

Fire Team Alpha was led by Kara Hildenâ€|and she proved to be a good user of the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and had a good head on her shoulders, meaning that as she had undergone the training, she had proven to be able to keep in track of her mission objectives. She had also been proven to be somewhat skilled with the M7 Caseless Submachine Gun and carried one with her as well.

Fire Team Bravo was led by Hilda Sera, she proved to have some skills with the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, and while not really the best shooter he had seen, she would do well enough as she had decided to have some of her fellow women in Bravo Fire Team to wield the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifles, along with BR55 HB SR Battle Rifles as well as the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle.

Fire Team Charlie was led Sheena Conrad, she proved to have skills with both the BR55 SR Battle Rifle, the M7 Caseless Submachine Gun and the M90A CAWS Shotgun, and as such, her team seemed the best suited for a flexible role as a rifle group and close combat team, and that would certainly come in handy in certain battle field scenarios. They also had some skills with explosives as well.

Fire Team Delta was led by Carla Sandrel, she herself had been able to prove to be a good shot with the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, and with the newly created M7S Suppressed SMG, the rest of her team mates were proving to be better shots now that they got the training that they all needed to be an effective strike team.

Fire Team Eagle was led by Fiona Marlene, she had proven to be skilled in demolitions work and carried a MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and wielded the M41 SSR MAV/ AW Rocket Launcher known to the UNSC Marines and Army as the 'Jackhammer' or more affectionately the 'Spanker'. She was not very accurate with the weapon in a broad sense, but her skill was noticeable and that was why she and her team had a few of these on hand.

And Fire Team Fox was led by Rena Yugami who was skilled with the BR55 SR Battle Rifle and the M6G Personal Defense Weapon System or the M6G Magnum. She also proved herself to be a skilled driver of the Warthog and that made her a good all around leader for her team and a good driver of some of the vehicles that they would soon be using in their operations in the near future.

The Spartan made sure that all the women had the needed skills and training to use all of the weapons, equipment, and vehicles of the UNSC to make them a bit more flexible in battle, and he planned to train them in the use of the newly manufactured weapons based from Covenant technology, namely the Tpe-25 Directed Energy Rifle or commonly known as the Plasma Rifle, the Type-25 Directed Energy Pistol or more known as the Plasma Pistol, the Type-51 Carbine, the Type-50 Sniper Rifle System or the Particle Beam Rifle, the Type-1 Energy Sword, the Type-2 Energy Weapon/Hammer, the Type-33 Guided Munitions Launcher or the Needler, and the Type-33 Light Anti-Armor Weapon or the Fuel Rod cannon.

The weapons were based on all the data that Cortana had in her mind and had downloaded into the manufacturing center of the UNSC section of the Nirvanaâ€|that and the aid of both the new age engineering technologies Cortana incorporated into the systems, and the Paeksis' energies and features allowed Cortana the ability to truly master their creations, though the Covenant technology was still having the same weakness, and that was the fact that most of their plasma based weapons still needed to be recharged. Cortana created power recharge stations on different sections of the UNSC section and the Paeksis had somehow installed recharging stations for the weapons on the Nirvana as well on different areas. The Covenant weapons were pretty much the same except that the Paeksis was able to shed small pieces of itself to form the basis ammunition for the Needler and from his years of fighting the Covenant, the Spartan knew that this weapon deserved respect from him and all of the UNSC who had either used it, or were shot at by it as well.

More than one UNSC trooper in his or her early days had been confused by the Grunt constructed weapon, and learned quickly the deadly power

in the weapon itself. The homing crystals were totally alien to the UNSC when such items were indeed taken from Covenant bodies and studied, there was nothing like it and it made most UNSC 'Smart' munitions look like child's toys as the weapons were able to move and track their foes with little to no trouble through heat and organic signatures. He and the others had used them before and they knew the power of the Needler. One crystal might not do much damage—but when a bunch of these weapons were able to bury themselves into the flesh or body of any opponent before the user, the needles would then detonate in a massive blast that was able to kill even the toughest fighter easily—and even grenades were not safe as the weapon could easily detonate them as well—further adding lethality to the weapon. It was known that before the Needler was used—the crystals that made the basis for the ammunition of the weapon were used in the function of daggers and knives by Covenant troops.

When the crystals exploded into the flesh of the victim they hit, the victim would suffer considerable tissue damage and when it large numbers, the results were deadly and anyone caught in the blast were also damaged by it as well. It had the power to punch through shields of both his Mjolnir Armor and that of the Elites as well, though the weapons had difficulty taking out Jackal Shields. The new versions that he had used were more powerful than the previous models, showing that despite their disdain for his species, the Covenant had taken some lessons to heart and upgraded only a few of their weapons to be more flexible in combat.

The Paeksis version was by all respects, the same, but it appeared to have in increased homing quality and had slightly more explosive power than the original and appeared to have the ability to be able to further boost the damage power of the needles, though at the expense of most of it's ammunition type's unique tracking ability, but this made it more effective in damaging a single target, and if there was one thing the Spartan had learned over the years, was that anything had a purpose as well.

The second weapon was the Carbine, he had known it's potential and had more than once managed to evade attacks from Jackal Marksmen armed with them. The weapon was among the few weapons in the Covenant arsenal that used projectiles than their dominant plasma weapons. It had a scope and was considered by several UNSC users to be the Covenant counterpart of the Battle Rifle. It used an unknown type of radioactive substance as it's base ammunition in a 18 round sized cylindrical magazine that worked like a stripper style magazine and in the hands of the Covenant, while not very prolific was lethal indeed. It also had a lethal effect on the Flood and their many forms, along with the newly modified Plasma Rifle. And unlike the Battle Rifle—it was effective on shields of all known types due to it's energy based ammunition.

The new version made by Cortana was able to also used Paeksis energy as it's base, and used crystals to form the ammunition base—but it had a higher amount of energy to go with it, further adding to it's overall damage power as a weapon, and this time, unlike the yellowish-green energy trail, it was replaced with a deep blue energy trail.

He had admitted that the weapons which they could now use were very impressive and could certainly come in handy in the missions soon to come. He however made sure to remind the women of the need to learn

how to truly use all the weapons in their arsenals, namely with the newly issued Covenant based weapons that Cortana was introducing into their arsenals as these were new and very effective weapons. He then looked over the reports and decided to call it a night for the women.

"Cease Fire!"

The women followed his orders and stopped shooting at the targets in the shooting range and watched as the battered targets were replaced with fresh ones. They turned to face the Spartan as he went over to the score board to see who had the better shots and then placed the names on the board, and the women were happy that they all had good scores.

"Not badâ€|that's it for todayâ€|you can go back to you're posts, don't forget to keep you're data-pads and chatters close and check for viruses in the data-drives."

"Yes Sir!"

As the women placed their weapons in the racks nearby and left the range, the Spartan took the time off to head for the gym for some training, and as soon as he got there, he was surprised to see Cortana training as well, lifting a few weights and she was dressed in a tight body suit style sleeveless tank-top that showed her strong and muscular arms and her own toned stomach. The now human AI also wore a pair of fingerless training gloves on her hands and training shoes on her feet and a pair of tight fitting training pants as well.

The overall picture caused a stir in the Spartan's mind a bit and he wondered just why he suddenly looked at Cortana more intensely. He put those thoughts aside and walked over to Cortana.

"Working out the stress?"

Cortana smiled a bit as she placed down the weights as she faced the Spartan.

"Yeah, I figured I needed to work out a bit once in a whileâ€|and I have to admit, feeling the strain physically is rather different."

"Shouldn't you be working with the Register at this time of the day?"

Cortana nodded as she took a towel offered by the Spartan who took it from the rack nearby and offered it to his long time friend, charge, and companion.

"I was, but Miss Gascogne gave me some time off for myself and I decided to take it here."

"By working out?"

"Yeah, hey John?"

"Yes?"

"Care to spar with me?"

This caught the Spartan somewhat off guard, he knew that even without his Mjolnir Armor on, he was by far more powerful than even the strongest human, and he could kill even with normal moves and attacks even if he pulled back his strength and it could be even worse for his opponent, having recalled how he had killed three ODSTs in a match before—and the idea of him doing the very same thing to Cortana made him VERY uneasy.

"I don't think that's such a good idea Cortana."

"Are you referring to the time you had killed the three ODSTs John?"

"How did you—?"

"Know about it? You know me John, I do my research—that and the fact that I was still an AI at the time and was allowed to choose you to be my protector kind of helped. I know why you're hesitant John, and I understand, but I am a human being now—and as much—as much as I owe you a lot for keeping me alive and helping me—I have to at least be able to defend myself—just in case I wind up in a situation when you're not around. I happen to know a lot about martial arts from the time I was an AI."

"So why do you want to spar with me then?"

"Because I want to learn how use them—and I doubt that I can find anyone to help me with the training since all of them have other priorities and that means that you're the only one who can teach me, I know you can do it John, and I know that you can control your natural strength, you've done it before, and you can do it here as well."

John-117 saw from Cortana's expression that she was not going to take no for an answer and despite being higher in rank than her, he couldn't help but decide to comply, and she did speak the truth, he did know how to control his strength and speed, just like the others and he knew that it would be better that he took off his Mjolnir as well.

"Fine, just give me a minute."

Later, the Spartan was now bare of his Mjolnir Mark 6 and was dressed in a set of gym clothes which comprised of a grey shirt with no sleeves and grey training pants with shoes as well. The two then sat down on the mat and then began to meditate, namely using the calming and meditative styles of Zen.

Zen was a school of Mahayana Buddhism that taught to its practitioners the value practice and experimental wisdom in the meditation known as zazen-in, known as the attainment of awakening, in this state, the practitioners discarded theoretical knowledge and the study of religious texts and rather rely on individual experiences of one's own true nature.

Dr. Catherine who developed a lot of smart AIs used her knowledge of this well in her missions to stop rampant AI, and while he and the other Spartans were not religious people, they did find the

meditations offered by Zen to be very calming before and even after a battle when they were in a safe zone. He knew for a fact that Kelly-087, and Linda-058 were practitioners of Zen as well.

As they were able to calm themselves, he and Cortana got up and began to spar, with him providing her advice on certain aspects of her knowledge of martial arts which might not have gotten her attention before. She nodded and thanked him for the corrections as they continued to spar. It was there that the Spartan noted that while she was a human being, Cortana's body was somewhat different.

Apart from her metabolic rates, and near perfect physical form, Cortana's human body had increased strength, stamina, agility, endurance, and dexterity. Not to the level of the Spartan, but near the level of a highly trained and conditioned UNSC Marine. That however didn't mean that she was invincible, as Cortana did get a few bruises aches once in a while as they sparred with one another, however, she was able to fight back with greater strength and force as they continued. And keeping to his promise, the Spartan did pull back most of his normal augmented strength and avoided hurting Cortana.

Cortana fought with a number of martial arts, namely Karate, Taekwondo, Muay Thai, Boxing, and Aikidoâ€|not in the same degree as his fellow Spartan Li- 008 who was the best among them in martial arts as he had trained extensively in the fighting arts for years on Chiron, the extreme environment training facility near Mars, and was also their chosen zero-gravity combat specialist. The former AI didn't have Li's skills in the martial arts, but she certainly more than made up for it with skill and determination.

An hour or two later, they took a break and the Spartan began to tell her what were the tricks of martial arts, while he wasn't highly skilled in martial arts as Li was, he more than made up for that with the balanced training he got from his days as a Spartan. As he talked with Cortana, he wondered just what else was going to happen today. They had not encountered the Harvesters in a whileâ€|with the exception of several skirmishers that were beaten back easily by the Dreads and the Vanguard Hibiki piloted. However, he had a feeling that things were about to get interesting soon enough.

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

"Captainâ€|I'm picking up what appears to be some sort of pod."

Amarone reported as she and the others began to lock on what they had been able to locate. They had detected the signal as they were all doing routine recon work to keep an eye out for any Harvester forces that might decide to attack them. However, they detected the pod instead.

"Is it a message pod?"

"I believe soâ€|but it's not from Megele or from Tarak since the signal's not from either our world or that of the men Captain."



"That must mean that it's from another human colony then—we might as well bring it in and see what's inside of it, anything else Amarone?"

Buzam asked as she and the others finally got a good look at the pod. It appeared to be a lot larger than the ones she had sent to Tarak and Megele, and it appeared to be heavily armored as well, and that was not normally seen in normal message pods at all.

"From our scans of the pod, it appears to be heavily protected for various situations and appears to have some sort of shield that blocks it from being affected by electromagnetic waves, ion storms, and cosmic radiation, whatever is in that pod, the people must really want it's contents of be safe."

"Hmm—it must have a high profile message then. That means that we have to get it now—send out Gascogne in the Dreki and the Dreads, and that young kid Hibiki out to get it. Once it's in our hands, we need to find out just who owns this pod and the message in it, and why do they want to protect it so badly."

Magno said as she also looked at the pod and wondered just what sort of message the pod carried that warranted such protection.

"Yes Captain!"

-----

As the crew gathered to hear the message as they were all called in by Magno, they were in their stations and were already sitting down, expecting this to be another warning about the Harvesters, however as they all gathered, they saw that it was a very serious message as a young man appeared with a large gash over the side of his face near the right eye and several gashes on his uniform—the background was filled with fire and ruined components, stating that the message was taken either in a ship or a base.

"I—I—Don't have much time left right now—I've locked—myself inside the—sub command bridge of the Bounder—our ship. My name is Quinn Caleb—.our ship—was part of—a relief convoy—carrying medical—supplies. We were—taking a special route through this—sector of space—but we—we were ambushed by—hordes of unknown fighters—we—tried to evade them as—our convoy was not equipped for fighting—"

The message continued as the sounds of explosions were heard, along with the sounds of gunfire—and shouts and screams as Quinn spoke once, apparently trying to stem the flow of blood in his body as he had a massive internal injury—but failed as a stream of blood flowed from his mouth.

"The—aliens—lured us into a trap—some kind of barrier—or net captured our convoy—we couldn't escape—and we were attacked at full force—their forces tore through us—and we saw—we were not—the only victims—entire wrecks were nearby—others had suffered this attack apart from us. They sent their—soldiers into our ships—"

The man began to get hysterical with only small amounts of control in

his body as he spoke once moreâ€|

"I saw themâ€|their soldiersâ€|more alien than menâ€|they killed the othersâ€|but did somethingâ€|horrible. Theyâ€|they tore them apartâ€|even when they were deadâ€|taking theirâ€|their organs as ifâ€|we were nothing but crops to be harvestedâ€|they even did it to the wounded and still aliveâ€|oh godâ€|I could hear their screams in my headâ€|"

"We fought as bestâ€|we couldâ€|but myâ€|friendsâ€|my comradesâ€|theyâ€|they didn't make itâ€|Those aliensâ€|they just tore them apartâ€|right before my eyesâ€|I got hit tooâ€|plasma burns onâ€|my backâ€|bleeding to death out hereâ€|going soon intoâ€|shock. I recordedâ€|the path we took, from the nav-com and was told byâ€|the captain to send this messageâ€|and I made it hereâ€|weâ€|we tried to abandon shipâ€|the podsâ€|their fightersâ€|out in space just took them. Iâ€|I don't think we are going to make itâ€|"

The sounds of an explosion were heard in the audio and the man named Quinn gave his final words.

"Iâ€|weâ€|we're not goingâ€|to make it, none of usâ€|are. Pleaseâ€|if anyone gets this messageâ€|stay away from this path at all costsâ€|orâ€|"

The entire image was suddenly filled with explosions as the crew saw one of the walls open and out from the massive hole came one of the same Harvester units that had attempted to invade the Nirvana before and that allowed the pirates to know just who the aliens were that attacked the ship. Quinn barely had time to even lift up his sidearm to defend himself before he fell down through massive blood lossâ€|and he was about to be gutted by the Harvester Shock Trooperâ€|but that was the end of the message.

The crew of the Nirvana was silent and realized just what sort of danger they were soon going to get towards. Magno was the first to take action as she ordered the bridge crew to begin accessing the charts stored in the message and to try and find out what was their best course of action.

-----

Laterâ€|

In the Conference Room, things have gotten underway, with the charts they were able to get from the message pod and from the maps that they had now, they began to look at the route they were currently taking and much to their shock, they discovered that they were taking the exact same route that the doomed convoy had taken as the route was between a moon and a large planet.

"We'll have to find an alternate route before we get there then. Is there any other path we can take BC?"

Buzam nodded and took the controls and began to show the other routes.

"There are Captain, but they don't seem too promising in the least, the one path we can take appears to be near the star in the system where the trap is supposed to be located, but the area will no doubt

be under heavy guard by the Harvestersâ€¦so we're sure to be detectedâ€¦I have also asked Cortana to offer her report as she had sent out several of her Clarion spy drones ahead to gauge the situation."

Magno turned and faced the holo-tank that was now in the Conference Room as Cortana appeared in her AI form. The former UNSC AI turned human woman had entered her AI form and had sent out the drones per Buzam's request to scan the area without endangering the Nirvana. She had been able to get enough information as she made her report. The AI form of Cortana then took over as she began to show the images she had been able to get from her Clarion Spy Drones.

"I seeâ€¦what do you have to report to us Cortana?"

"The situation's not looking very good Captain, the Harvesters have a sizable blockade force in the system and the star itself is an orange giant star with a very active surface and is putting out a lot of radiation and energy that could very well gum up our sensors and leave us vulnerable to attack if we take the route. If we take itâ€¦we might very well be blinding ourselves and we could be in serious trouble if the Harvester get the jump on us when we're very much deaf, dumb, and blind."

"So that means if we try to take the other routeâ€¦we run the risk of going in there like three blind mice."

"And right into the waiting arms of the Harvestersâ€¦what's the other route?"

"The next one will be risky either wayâ€¦we could try to evade the system and find a much better routeâ€¦but we will no doubt be detected as soon as we hit the sensor network the Harvesters have set upâ€¦my Clarion Spy Drones had a limited stealth mode so they didn't last very long hidden, but the Harvesters have picket forces in other parts of the system nearby and they could very well alert the others to our presenceâ€¦and there is the chance we could be herded into the trap if we try to escape."

Gascogne looked at the images and thought about it. She then got an idea as she looked at the Spartan who was also there in the Conference Room. She knew about his training of the pirate forces and while what she had in mind was rather risky, they were already running out of options. If they tried to take another route, the Harvesters would no doubt send their full blockade force on them and herd them into the trap they had in the area and they would be in serious troubleâ€¦but she then decided to test the theory.

"Cortanaâ€¦how much information do you happen to have on the nearby planet?"

"I happen to have picked up some ground images of the planet Miss Gascogneâ€¦and it seems we've found the weapon the Harvesters are using on the fleets. There appears to be a massive facility on the surface on the planetâ€¦and it's ideally located on a continent that as of now is in the path. The planet must have a very slow rotation frame since it's still the morning there. The planet has a breathable atmosphere for humansâ€¦but isn't exactly heaven on earthâ€¦it's mostly arid desert and a few mountainous areas as wellâ€¦no signs of

habitation either. The facility appears to be some sort of transmission center—the same type that transmits power to orbiting satellites and there appears to be debris in the area of the planet as well. They LOOK like natural space debris—but there are traces of signals coming from them—so that would mean that the facility is some sort of weapons platform."

Buzam thought about it and nodded with the direction of the conversation.

"Those satellites must be able to create some sort of energy net or field that holds a ship or a few ships in place, allowing the Harvesters to send in their forces to harvest the crew inside. If we take those out—we might have a chance to break free from the trap—however I don't think the Harvesters will give that advantage up without a fight, so no doubt they will have some powerful forces in the area to protect those transmitters."

Magno then had an idea as she recalled the information she had been able to get from Cortana previously at from what she had seen of the video records from the Master Chief's recorders, they just might do the trick.

"Cortana—can you're Long-swords be able to operate in the atmosphere of a planet?"

"They can Captain and they are capable of delivering ground based heavy munitions."

"Can they attack the installation and disable it long enough for our forces to break through the defense forces of the satellites and take them out?"

"That's the problem Captain—the Spy Drones detected a massive shield that protects the installation—no doubt from aerial or space based attacks. Even if we used the MAC guns, we might not have enough power to punch through the shield. They still don't have the ammunition to begin with right now and wasting the few precious rounds that we've managed to make so far would be too dangerous."

"Just how powerful is a MAC Gun?"

"It depends on the power, weight of the slug, and the target, a basic MAC gun can fire a 600 ton slug of depleted uranium or tungsten. And the Super MAC used in Orbital Defense Platforms can fire a 3000 ton slug, and if you want to know how deadly a MAC gun can be to a ground target—let me put it this way—The 600 ton round fired from a MAC gun at the speed of light can crash right through the crust of a planet and have the force of a nuclear warhead due to the sheer kinetic force it could unleash on it's target."

Cortana then spoke as she showed them the planet and began to run a simulation of the Nirvana moving in and attempting to use the MAC guns of the Nirvana.

"Even with me guiding the MAC guns' firing computers we have to keep the ship stable enough to fire the rounds accurately, and that can a danger if the Harvesters manage to swarm us and send their soldiers down here to invade us. And if that installation manages to create

the energy net we won't be able to maneuver well enough to either escape or get another firing angle if we tried using the MAC guns."

"Is there any way to take out the shields?"

"There appear to be massive energy towers in the area around the complex, and judging by the massive energy fluctuations that are coming from them, they must be the ones creating the force field that protects the installation. There also appears to be a large number of high grade power plants there as wellâ€¦no doubt those power plants provide both the shield and the installation a large portion of it's power supply. If we take those out, we might have a chance to either bomb it with the Long-swords or if you really want toâ€¦with the MAC gunsâ€¦but as long as the shields are activeâ€¦there's no way we can do either."

The officers thought this over and then Magno and Buzam shared a look to one another and a silent conversation took place as they both looked at the Spartan, John-117 saw that and already knew just what they were looking at him for.

"You want me to lead the ground teams down there to take out the installation am I correct?"

"Yes Master Chiefâ€¦but I want to know if you personally believe that they are ready for this kind of mission."

Magno knew for a fact that the Spartan had a limited time to train the forty-two women who formed the core of his fire teams and what she was asking was a very tall order for them as they were only given two and half months worth of trainingâ€¦but considering their situation at this point and time, they didn't have much in terms of options. The Spartan knew that as well as his tone of voice told them just that.

"To be honestâ€¦I don't think they are ready Captain, especially for something of this magnitude."

"Buzam noted that and had to agree with the Spartan, their ground teams were good in training but they were not yet ready for a ground battle, let alone a live oneâ€¦but she had to admit that considering their choices, they were not going to get much leeway on the matter. It was either they found a way to escape or wind up in the trap that claimed Quinn and his comrades.

"I'm afraid we don't have much choice Master Chief, we need to take out that installation, but we can't do it with that shield in the areaâ€¦our Dreads were designed solely for space combat and were not meant to fight on the surface of a planet, if they did, they would be unable to leave the planet afterwards. And with the shield active, a bomb run with the Long-swords would be worthlessâ€¦and using the MAC guns is out of the question as we would be too vulnerable to attacks from the Harvesters and their forces."

The Spartan remained silent as he digested the situation carefully and weighed his options, after a few more momentsâ€¦he gave his answer to their current situation.

"I'll get them ready for combat."

-----  
The crew members were surprised to hear the voice of the UNSC Spartan as he began to call out to his fire teams, calling them to assemble quickly in the UNSC section for suiting up and briefing for a new mission.

The women who formed the core fire teams looked at one another and wasted little time as they heeded the orders of their commander and moved to the UNSC section. They arrived to see the Spartan and Cortana who was still in her AI form tactical plans and the Spartan turned to face them all.

"Get you're gear up and readyâ€|we've got a mission."

The women were stunned as they were expecting another training drill from the Spartan, but their training told them not to waste time gaping and asking questions as they quickly made their way to the lockers and they began to head for the private rooms, to change out of their normal clothes and get dressed into their fatigues. As they were doing this, Cortana and the Spartan were already getting their gear and equipment ready for the coming battle as they wanted all of their options available as this would be the first ground mission they would be in.

The Spartan had no problems with the idea of going to the surface of a world and fight thereâ€|he had done it more times than even he could count, but this was going to be the very first time he would be the leader of an entire band of raw recruits he himself had personally trained. He felt more at home working with seasoned UNSC Marines, and his fellow Spartans, this was certainly something he was not in the least prepared for just yet, and he was worried that his training might not be enough and he would have to do his best to make sure that the women under his command would come back to the Nirvana alive and safe, but he sucked it up and got down to the brass tacks of the job.

He turned to spoke Hibiki as the Tarak youth came into the UNSC section, wearing his normal clothes and bare of the Marine Body Armor that he had been given as a gift as he had decided to wear it only if he was going out with his Vanguard on a mission.

"What is it Hibiki?"

"I heard you've got a mission on a planet Chiefâ€|you want me to come along too? I can really be of some help!"

"I wish I could have you come with us Hibiki, but I need you here to work with the women and their Dread forces, I know you're Vanguard can handle a ground mission, but we can't afford that right nowâ€|you're Vanguard and the VanDreads it can form will be the key to beating the Harvesters here in space. Besidesâ€|this is something I can do well enough, the crew of the Nirvana will need you here, do you understand?"

Hibiki was not happy with not being able to accompany his idol, teacher, mentor, and to his own admission, something of a brother or father figure. However he had learned enough from the Spartan to know that what the Spartan had said was very much true as they needed the

VanDreads in space and he was eager to fight the Harvesters this time.

"I understand Master Chief."

"Good, remember you're training and you're lessons from me, and you'll do all right, make sure to follow the orders of the Dread leader, remember, despite the two of you not getting along, you all need to work together to win this battle."

"I understand Master Chiefâ€¦good luck out there and may the Gods of Tarak protect you."

"Thanksâ€¦good luck and good hunting out there to you as well, may God watch over you."

The two men, mentor and student saluted each other with respect as Hibiki left the room, planning to make the Spartan proud of him and prove to himself that he was a capable pilot and member of the crew, not mention a man of Tarak.

"I see the boy's grown up somewhat."

Cortana said with a smile as she looked at Hibiki as he left the room. The Spartan merely shrugged as he got back to work, but not before he spoke about Hibiki.

"He'll do just fine."

-----

The women were already getting dressed into their combat fatigues and as they did so, they quickly slid in their dog tags to the reader devices that were logged into their chosen lockers, allowing them to access their body armor and chosen personnel equipment. As they were dressed in their new combat fatigues, and began to strap on their body armor, they then grabbed their helmets and got them on. They then went over to the weapon racks, and out came their weapons and they grabbed their weapons and then reached for the ammunition depots and grabbed as many magazines to their weapons, along with whatever weapons and supplies they needed as they moved to the meeting hall.

The Spartan was there waiting for them all and then as they got together, with the Fire-Teams' NCOs already in front of them as they waited for the information to be given to them about their new mission. The Spartan then began to show them the information that the Clarion Spy Drones had been able to bring in as Cortana began to gather all the details and showed them on the hologram planning table.

"As you all are now aware, we have recovered a message pod and you have no doubt seen the messageâ€¦and you know what happened to the person who was in the message. The Harvesters have set up a trap in the path we are currently taking to head back to Megele and Tarak, and have already claimed a large number of victims on their listâ€¦we're going to make sure we're not going to be on that list."

The images turned to the planet and the installation in question as

the Spartan began to speak once more, after allowing the women to see just what they were about to assault with their weapons and their training for the past two months.

"We've managed to locate the installation that is the heart of the weapon system that the Harvesters are using in this trap. As you no doubt can see, this installation is the one we have to take out in order to make sure that their trap is destroyed."

"Can't we bombard it from Space sir?"

The Spartan shook his head and turned to Cortana.

"There are several key factors that go against the option of orbital bombardment in this mission. Cortana will be the one to elaborate, so pay attention to her as she gives out the tactical data."

The fire teams and their NCOs paid close attention to the AI as she took over the tactical briefing and they knew that the woman was not the kind to lie about an important mission objective. They knew that their commander trusted the woman very well and that they could trust her as well.

"The installation is protected by a powerful shield system that renders orbital bombardment to be ineffective, that and the dangers of us being overwhelmed and being captured at the same time makes the attempts at orbital attacks unwise. However, there is a good side to the situation. The shields appeared to be generated by several structures that surround the installation."

The images moved from the massive installation that was shaped like a dome with hexagonal panels on the top of it and several smaller towers on it in the position of an octagon, to the tower structures near it that formed the shielding system. They resembled massive towers with three throngs on them that rotated and released massive waves of energy outward and spread out in a 180 degree arc over the area and connected with the energy waves being released by the other towers, forming the shield that covered the entire installation.

"The good news we have is that the shield apparently is designed to fend off massive attacks from space and aerial attackâ€|not from the ground as the shielding in that area appears to be of a weaker power level than the energy used to protect the upper sections of the shields. This however is yet to be verified since the Clarion Spy Drones were not designed for travel in the atmosphere of a planet. This is our best option as with the shield protecting it from space or aerial attack, there is no way either the Nirvana or the Long-swords can launch a successful attack on the installation with it online. Taking out one of the towers should bring the shield down. But we have to then target these installations nextâ€|they are the power plants of the installation."

The images then were to several large banks of strange rectangular structures that had glowing bluish energy in them, and it appeared to have special connectors to the installation itself, and it appeared to be underneath the protective field of the shield towers that also guarded the installation.

"These structures are the ones that provide the place with it's main



power requirements. We don't know the exact type of fuel they are using, but we do know that a vast portion of the power needed to run the installation and the shield system is coming from these power plants. If we take them out, and the installation as wellâ€¦the Nirvana will have a clear run out of the system once we punch through the Harvester lines. That's the key reason we will be taking the attack route on the ground."

The Spartan took over and spoke to the assembled fire teams.

"Once we take out one of the Shield Towers, our objectives are to disable the power plants and destroy the installation. The Dreads and the Long-swords under Cortana's control will fly cover for us in the Albatross while we're in deep space and once we've hit the atmosphere, the Long-swords will provide us air support and help us destroy the installation once one of the shield towers are deactivated."

The Spartan then spoke to the fire teams before him in a serious tone.

"Make one thing clear, this installation is of prime tactical and strategic importance to the Harvesters, so it will not be surprising if we will be encountering resistance down thereâ€¦and it will no doubt be heavy resistance. You will not be going down to an uninhabited world but one no doubt used and claimed by the enemy."

The Spartan then took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and loaded it with a fresh clip of ammunition, and this time, the women saw him load real rounds into the weapon, showing to them that this was no longer a training exercise, but the real thing, and the Spartan's next words made that very clear.

"This is what you all have been training for in the past two and a half months and you will be facing the enemy that you have been training to face. This time, the energy bolts and bullets will not be set to stun or be blanksâ€¦but be live ammunition that can kill."

The Spartan then looked at each of the NCOs for each Fire Team that he had been training for missions such as this, he could tell that they were afraid and anxious. And he couldn't blame them for that, as this will be the very first time they will be fighting the Harvesters for real, and there was a chance that they would not come back alive or unharmed from this kind of combat.

"The lives of your fellow fire team members are in your hands, as your life will be in theirs. Do what you have to go make sure all of you get back safely. Watch you're lines of fire and keep cool, pick you're targets and conserve you're ammunition, don't waste you're shots at all."

The Spartan then locked in his Assault Rifle behind him and gave the signal for the women under his command to get ready for combat as they all headed towards the Hanger Bay. Once they were in the area, they boarded the Albatross and the Spartan went to work and got the ship ready for departure. The Albatross was fully stocked with extra weapons, explosives, ammunition, spare parts, vehicles, body armor, medical items and more for this operation, and would serve as both

their mode of transportation, their base of operations, and their ride off the planet once the mission was deemed successful—and with the long range uplink between him and Cortana, he and the rest of the fire teams would have a chance to finish this mission and protect their ship and fellow pirates from any possible attack.

The Spartan and the pirate Fire Teams were about to go planet side.

-----

As the Dreads and the Long-swords were leaving the Nirvana, the orders of the Dreads were to provide covering support, along with Hibiki's Vanguard for the ground teams to land on the surface of the planet safely and accomplish their objectives. They were then joined by the Albatross and the assembled force made their way to the planet with the Nirvana close behind.

The Dreads and the Long-swords would have to distract the Harvester blockade force in space to make sure that they didn't intercept and destroy the Albatross as it would make it's way through the atmosphere and land on the surface as it had no means of defense.

Meia watched as the strike teams were on their way, she wished her comrades in the Albatross good luck and silently vowed that if the Spartan failed to make all of them come back alive and safe, then may heaven help her, she would make him pay—though as to how she would do that—

She tabled those thoughts aside for the moment and focused on leading her forces and providing support for the Nirvana. She still was a bit angry at not being part of this mission with the others, and making sure that they were all right, but she had little authority in the matter of the ground forces as the UNSC Spartan was given full command of the operation.

"All Dreads will form a defensive wall to stop any of the Cube Fighters from attacking the Albatross until they make contact with the planet's atmosphere. The Long-swords will then take over and provide support fire for them. We'll keep the Harvesters occupied until they have completed their mission on the surface."

"Roger!"

"Do you think they're ready for the mission they have on their hands?"

Jura asked her leader as the Albatross was deep in their ranks, the blonde Dread pilot had already seen how much of a leader the Spartan was in combat, being under his temporary command at one point in the mission on the desert world, but that certainly didn't stop her from worrying about the safety of her fellow women.

"I don't know—but we'll have to wait and see if that Spartan can truly lead well."

Barnette looked at the Albatross and snorted, still miffed at being under the command of the seven foot tall armored male. She didn't

like taking orders from a man, but there was indeed something about the Spartan that told her straight up, not to argue with him.

Hibiki listened to their chatter and sighed as he ran through his Vanguard's systems. The Spartan told him to also make systems checks on his Vanguard in order to fix any left over bugs in the systems to make sure he didn't become a victim of circumstances and bad luck. As he did so, he then got a communication call from Dita and took it.

"Hi Mr. Alien, how are you doing?"

Hibiki sighed a bit, still annoyed with the Mr. Alien reference that Dita placed on him, but he decided to reply back to her question, after all, she did deserve an answer to her question and when a man is asked a question, he had to answer.

"I'm feeling fine right now, eager to go after the Harvesters once more and beat the snot out of them."

Dita smiled a bit as she liked Mr. Alien's enthusiasm, and wondered on another matter, namely on how the Green Alien would do once he and the others were on the surface of the planet being used by the bad aliens.

"Will Mr. Green Alien be all right Mr. Alien?"

"The Master Chief will be fine, he knows how to lead others in a ground fight than anyone I know of back home, so don't worry about him and the others, worry for the Harvesters when they meet him again."

"Can the chatter you twoâ€¦we've got incoming Harvester contacts heading right for us, they'll be right on us in exactly thirty minutes so look sharp!"

"Got it Leader!"

"Don't worry about me!"

Meia then contacted the Albatross as they were now at an acceptable distance from the planet. The Dread squadron leader knew that they had to hurry as she began to check her Dread's weapons systems. The Nirvana would not be far behind and the Dreki would be on standby to replenish the Dreads in combat, and at least with Hibiki and his vanguard around, they could use the VanDreads to back up their attacks on the Harvesters just in case they need an extra punch to break through, as much as she disliked the idea of merging with the Vanguard, she knew that the VanDreads were their best tactical weapons in this kind of fight.

As soon as she got into contact with the Spartan she immediately spoke to him in her usual business-like manner.

"The Harvesters will be here in thirty minutes, we'll slow them down until you're ground forces are in position to strike onto the surface of the planet, once that's done, you're on your own until you need us to escort you all back from the planet's surface."

"I understand, Spartan-117 out."

In the Albatross, the Spartan reached the intercom to all the assembled female pirates who were ready and nervous as he spoke to them all, just as the Long-swords were the first to breach the planet's atmosphere. He was currently in the cockpit of the Albatross with Cortana acting as guidance computer for him. The long range comm. system that was given to Cortana's holo-tank back on the Nirvana also allowed her to send herself in AI form to the holo-tank of ships such as the Albatross. She guided the Spartan to the NAV point marker where there was a good landing sight. The Spartan then asked the former UNSC AI an important question.

"Is there any sign of an ambush below us Cortana?"

The AI shook her head as she got the confirmation the Long-Swords had passed the atmosphere and were now scanning the landing zone any potential dangers for the landing party, and thankfully found none that warranted a change in a landing zone location.

"Nothing John, we're all good to land."

The Spartan nodded as the Albatross began to shake, showing that it was already hitting the atmosphere. He then spoke to the rest of the ground team who were already strapped into their seats before they went out in the Albatross.

"Get ready—we're entering the planet's atmosphere in five minutes!"

The women braced themselves and some held on tight to the restraints as the shaking continued to grow around them but all of their supplies, equipment, and their vehicles were already locked in and they were hoping to make it out alive from the landing. Outside, the Albatross' high grade Lead foil and Titanium A hull began to glow as the Albatross was being taken down to the planet's surface by gravity. The Spartan made sure to keep the Albatross at a level heading as they punched through the atmosphere—the shaking continued as the hull of the Albatross was now red hot but held on as the Spartan with Cortana's help made it down to the surface of the planet. As soon as he got word from Cortana that they were past the atmosphere, he ignited the engines and then guided the ship to the landing zone.

As soon as the Albatross landed on the surface of the barren world, he left the cockpit and called all the women together to the assembly area of the Albatross. As soon as the women were there, the Spartan organized them into a mobile armor force as they had several Warthogs with them along with the Scorpion Tanks and some Mongooses. The Albatross had been upgraded by Cortana when it was built to house more than the usual amounts of supplies, weapons, vehicles, ammunition, armor, and equipment without losing its already impressive abilities as a transport and mobile command center.

The fire teams were each told to use a LRV Warthog and a LAAV Warthog and one Scorpion Tank for heavy Armor and ranged Artillery support, at least all of the fire teams were now assigned to the use of vehicles while the Spartan was in command of a single Mongoose and as the ramps of the Albatross went down, the Spartan got on the Mongoose and gave the orders for the ground teams.

"I'll scout ahead to the objective, use the NAV markers to locate me and meet up with me for the attack on the mission. Remember, keep you're eyes open and be alert, we're in the Harvesters' back yard now."

With that, the Spartan who had armed himself with a SRS99D- S2 Anti-Material Rifle with full battle load and a pair of M6G Pistols, and his spare weapons and ammunition in a small weapons pack he strapped in the back of the Mongoose took off, with the rest of the ground teams following their commander into battle. The Spartan made sure to keep himself within the tracking systems of his ground teams as the Warthogs and the Scorpions followed him a good distance behind him. He wanted the Scorpions to serve as mobile artillery and to engage the Harvesters should they have armor with them.

-----

In the Nirvanaâ€¦|

"Captain, the Dreads have encountered the Harvester blockade forces, they have escorted the Albatross safely and are now engaging the Harvester forces. And we have confirmation that the ground forces have been able to land and are on their way to the target installation."

Magno nodded as the Nirvana was being guided by Bart to get to a fair distance from the fighting as the area of space was brought to life by the explosions of missiles and the bright lights of beam weapons. The Nirvana was to be nearby for the Dreki to do it's job of rearming and refueling the Dreads when they need to be back into the fight, the remaining long-sword interceptors that were not part of the support force for the ground teams were under the control of Cortana and they flew alongside the Dreads to lend their support to the pirates.

"TAKE THIS!!!"

Hibiki shouted as he took out his Vanguard's energy sword and slashed down two more Cube Fighters in a single pass. The Vanguard pilot kept his attacks moving as the Spartan told him to be on the move and to use any form of cover as best he could to get the right angle of attack without alerting the Harvesters to his intentions. This was proven true as he used the burning remains of several Cube Fighters as make shift shields and also as barriers to slow down his attackers. He also took the time to train using his Vanguard's shorter energy sword and use it as a throwing weapon and managed to take out a few more.

Meanwhile, the Dreads were busy taking down as many more Cube Fighters as they could manage at this rate and then take out the Seed Ships that began to appear in the area. They focused their fire on the Seed Ships once the Cube Fighters were out of the way. Meia focused her shots on several Cube Fighters and took them out using the enhanced speed of her Dread to her advantage while leading the other Dreads in the offensive.

After the confirmation that the ground teams were deployed on the ground for battle from Cortana and Buzam, Meia orders her Dread teams to form up and attack the Harvesters and defend the Nirvana as best

they could. The surviving Long-swords were providing support fire for the Dreads and also a squadron was there to shield the Nirvana alongside the Dread defenders as the Nirvana moved in, but yet well beyond the range of the installation, this would keep the Harvesters focused on trying to lure them into the trap and less focused on the ground teams.

Magno looked at the battle out in space and then directed her attention to the images coming from the ground forces as they had their helmet recorders patched into the Nirvana's communication networks, and so did the Spartan through his Mjolnir Mark VI's COM system, allowing to see his point of view as well. They watched as the Spartan led his forces and was now reaching the key objective and as soon as he arrived, he got off his Mongoose and took out the Sniper Rifle and lay down in a nearby outcropping of stone and scanned the area.

The planet was indeed barren, with loose sand and rock moving about in some strong winds, along with large jagged rocks and cliffs all aboutâ€¦not a single sight of anything green in the area. As he checked the shield tower nearby through his Sniper Rifle's scope, he made sure to keep in radio contact with the rest of his fire teams and update them on the situation. The shield tower and the energy shield itself was well protected on the ground by a series of defense groups and he spotted a pair of them moving through the shield. He however knew that he couldn't attack just yet and he knew that until he got the data right, they couldn't make a move. As soon as he got confirmation that the rest of the teams were a fair distance away, he ordered the NCOs to have the vehicles stop moving and hold, while the NCOs' and their fellow Fire Team members were to form up and move.

As soon as they were in the area, the Spartan took the time to study the situation and decided to test the waters personally as he took careful aim with his Sniper Rifleâ€¦telling the women to wait for his go signal to make the strike past the barrier once he was sure of the situation. The NCOs and their fellow fire teams agreed with the Spartan's orders and held their positions. The Spartan then took the shot.

The Sniper Rifle's 14.5 x 114 mm APFSDS round flew through the air and sliced right through the shield, a testament to the anti-material nature of the weapon and busted through the chest of one of the Harvester units and right through anotherâ€¦both hits were right in the area where the synthetic 'heart' was located and the creatures bled and dropped dead immediately. The Spartan wasted little time as he knew that the rest of the patrols were going to be on their way soon as soon as he readjusted his Sniper Rifle's sights, he scanned for more targets and spotted several more of the units coming in to check out what had happened to their comrades.

He fired yet another round and this one busted through the head of the Harvester unitâ€¦splashing it's magenta colored blood all over the place and the round did the very same to it's other comrades that were moving in formation and the three of them had their heads blown to bits by the sheer force of the round and they fell to the ground dead, their CPs completely scrambled by the Sniper Rifle's round. The Spartan then got into his Mongoose and silently hoped that he was going the right thing and mentally commanded his Mjolnir to increase power to the shields. The women watched as their commander started

the engine and rushed towards the shield.

The Spartan passed right through the shield with little trouble, apparently the shield was only designed to protect the installation from orbital and atmospheric bombardment—not from a ground assault and that was the key to winning this fight, but the shield appeared to be an early warning system as the entire area was filled with alarms. The Spartan quickly ordered the rest of his Fire Teams to move in and move in they did as the drivers of the Warthogs activated their vehicle's engines and the Warthogs moved in and also passed the shields as the Scorpions moved in and passed shields as well, though at a slightly slower pace than the other UNSC based vehicles.

The Spartan found several deep pits with large rock outcroppings that were easy to get out of on foot and even by the Warthogs and quickly ordered the fire teams to place their Warthogs into them and use the locations as a temporary fox hole as there appeared to be a lot of cover in the area that they could use in order to reach the shield tower that they would have to take out quickly as they advanced. The Harvesters now knew that they were coming and the Spartan used his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle's scope to spot a new type of transport.

The vehicle resembled a Phantom drop-ship but appeared not to have any weapon ports or hard points and appeared to be an anti-gravity style ground transport. The new Harvester transport then opened at the front and the sides to unleash more of the same Harvester bio-mechanical units that he had destroyed before and they were now moving in formation to attack them. He wasted little time and gave the order for a maximum kill zone to be set up by the pirate fire teams and the women scrambled to accomplish the objective he gave them.

The Warthogs were placed side by side with the driver ready to move the vehicle just in case the fire team needed more room, along with allowing the second Warthog to fire at the angle where it couldn't reach, for now however the Warthogs were being directed by the Spartan to wait for the order to set up the kill-zone and to wait for his order to fire. The Spartan knew that the best way to use Warthogs was on the move and he knew that this was going to be one heck of a first day for the drivers and the gunners of the LRV and LAAV variants of the Warthog. The women got their weapons ready and as each NCO reported to the Spartan that they were ready, the Spartan waited and told them not fire until he fired first.

The large number of Harvester troops meant that they were going to be slaughtered very quickly if they went into the kill-zone, however it seemed that the alien forces didn't care as they moved in closer and closer into the kill-zone, and once they were within it. The Spartan spoke once more in a calm tone—just as he pulled the trigger of his Sniper Rifle—the round barely left the barrel when he spoke to all of the Fire Teams.

"Fire at will."

The second they heard the command—the women unleashed a massive barrage of bullets right into the incoming mass of Harvester forces. The Warthogs fired their weapons, The LRV's main weapon, the M41 Light Anti-Aircraft Gun unleashing a massive barrage of 12.7 x 99mm armor piercing rounds at the number of 450 to 550 per minute—even

though the accuracy was a bit blocked by sustained fire from recoil, the numbers of Harvester units in front it meant that even if the rounds didn't go for a straight line, the rounds that did angle off still hit the enemy fast and hard, the LAAV unleashing it's signature gauss rounds, the rounds were naturally made of depleted uranium and fired by the powerful magnets at hyper velocity speeds, though there was little splash damage from the weapon, the power it had made sure to destroy rows of enemy troops and critically wound the ones nearby.

The former passengers of the Warthogs also unleash their barrage of weapons fire quickly and some of them even fired their M90A Shotguns, and while the pellets did little damage at longer ranges, the density of the alien formation made that a bit redundant.

The instant barrage caught the Harvester troops completely off guard. The first unit was killed instantly as the round from the Spartan's Sniper Rifle sliced right through the neck and killed it, along with three of it's fellow units. The rest found themselves being cut down in a massive hail of bullets. Since they only had passive shielding against energy weapons on their armor and an anti-ablative coating on their pseudo flesh, they were being shredded apart by the bullets as the rounds ripped into their bodies and tore them apart. Several of them alien soldiers managed to recover and fire back with their integrated plasma cannons, but they were also cut down as the Spartan fired another round into their ranks—cutting them down quickly and effectively before they could mount a counter offensive. The units unleashed a massive barrage of plasma bolts right at the pirates, forcing some of them to duck and move away, using the rocks as cover. The smell of gunpowder and ozone was everywhere. And white hot fragments of stone flew in the air as the fire fight was reaching the end.

The sounds of gunfire filled the area and the sounds were very much destructive as the Warthogs and the Fire Teams continued to open fire. The Spartan saw the first Harvester force were all wiped out, but his Sniper Rifle's scope allowed him to spot six more of the transports already on their way to attack them. He got quickly into contact with the Scorpions and their pilots and spoke to them as he fed the images from his COM system.

"We have incoming Harvester Transports coming in at these coordinates. Aim main canons and fire at my mark."

"Roger that Sir! You heard the Chief ladies, let's get busy!"

"Yeah!"

The drivers of the Scorpions began to lock their cannons and as they worked on their targeting displays, they spotted the incoming Harvester Troop Transports and began to lock on the targets as the Transports rushed in to destroy their comrades. They were eager to fire, but they waited for the signal from the Chief.

Back on the lower ground, the women were given the order to cease fire as the first band of the Harvester Troopers were cut down by the ambush, but the Spartan quickly halted any celebration in the ranks, making them aware that the real battles was about to begin as he spotted the new transports coming in. He then gave the order to fire



at will to the Scorpion Tank drivers.

"All Scorpionsâ€¦ fire at will. I repeat, all Scorpions, fire at will!"

"Roger that Chief! You heard him, fire at will!!!"

The sounds of massive cannon fire filled the air as the Scorpions unleashed their rounds right in the enemy forces, the rounds whistling into the air and smashing with enough force to rip stone and reduce it into nothing but rocky splinters and dust. The main weapon of the M808 Scorpion Main battle Tank was it's highly advanced 90mm High Velocity Gun/Cannon that fired a dense tungsten based projectile that could smash through infantry like they were not even there, and shred armor like a hammer would smash to bits an egg.

The results were heavy as one Harvester Transport took one right in the front as it was opening to deploy it's troops, they barely had enough time to take one step out of the transport as the tungsten round ripped right into them and tore them all to shreds, along with the transport as it was blown wide open as the round smashed into the rear energy core and engine section. The entire transport blew to bits in the same way a can would be blown apart when it covered a lit fire-crackerâ€¦ the Troopers inside fared little better as their bodies and the parts of their bodies were scattered all over the place.

Another Transport was hit dead on as well and half of the entire transport was blown apart to kingdom come. Burning wreckage was sent flying in different directions as the Transport lost itself and crashed right into a massive outcropping of rock and blew itself to pieces, The Troopers inside were now nothing more than charred bodies and body parts reduced into nothing but charred remains. There were some that were apparently still somewhat intact and were blown out of their transport and they were moving towards the pirates in order to engage them, despite their extensive damage.

Another transport was hit hard and had a massive section of it's side ripped off by the explosion and the damage was seen as the transport had a smoking hole where the left side used to be. The Transport burned and it didn't take very long for the damage to become even more severe as the transport suffered another explosion inside of itâ€¦ no doubt the explosion had damaged the fuel core system and that destroyed the Transport dead on. The burning hulk settled and from the ruins came a few surviving Harvester Troopers who also moved in.

Yet another Transport was hit and this time. The blast was at the side and the impact was enough that it had actually flipped the Transport to the right and it fell right into a deep ditch, trapping it and rendering it unable to unleash it's forces into the battle, The hit had also torn off a section of it's armor at it was already burning. The Transport was rendered unable to unleash it's forces and this forced them to have to fire their way out of their own transportâ€¦ that produced explosive results as the Transport exploded from the internal damage being inflicted on it by it's own troops.

Another Transport was unleashing it's troops, but the shot from one of the Scorpion Tanks hit right into the massing number of Harvester

Troopers and they were shredded to pieces by the impact of the weapon and they were scattered, the blast also severely mauled the Transport and left the front of it looking like a massive set of teeth had just taken a massive bite out of it, chewed it up, and spat it right back out as sections of armor were torn off by the blast, along with other components as well. The surviving Harvester Troopers moved in and began to activate their weapons, stepping over the remains of their slain comrades without a care at allâ€|befitting their creation as war machines, as they moved in formation to engage the Spartan and the pirate fire teams.

Another Transport was about to stop and release it's payload of harvester Troopers, but had no time as a shell slammed right on top of it and sheared off a large portion of it's upper armor and the round punched through to the floor, making the Transport explode at the rear of the Transportâ€|forcing it to stop dead in it's tracksâ€|and a few seconds laterâ€|the Transport exploded into a fireball, it's engine core totally destroyed.

The Spartan nodded as he looked through the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle's scoped sights and saw the results of the shots and he gave the order for the Scorpions to move in and engage the enemy, he fired a few more rounds into the enemy ranks, taking down several more of the Harvester Troopers as he reloaded his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and fired another batch of rounds at the Harvesters. The APFSDS rounds of SRS99 99D-S2 AM the Sniper Rifle punched through their body armor and their pseudo flesh like a hot knife through butter and hit them in their critical areas. The Master Chief had made sure to study the frames of the harvester Troopers he had killed and was able to locate critical weak points that his weapons could further exploit to minimize the usage of ammunition for his weapons.

He also taught the same lessons to the women as he saw them taking the time to pick their targets and their spots to eliminate the enemy, namely Fire Team Bravo who were using the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifles to good effect, though despite their training, they still had to get used to the massive recoil made by the rifles when they fired. The Spartan then looked ahead and spotted more Transports coming in, but this time, they were wary and had unleashed their payloads of Harvester Troopers early and had now sent them streaming towards them in large formations. The Spartan knew that unless they were able to take out the tower in their areaâ€|they would be in serious trouble and they had to do it soon.

"All Fire Teams, prepare to engage the enemy on the moveâ€|use the environment as cover and make you're way to the Tower to take it out, All Warthogs and Scorpions are to provide support fire for the advance."

"Roger!"

The Spartan placed away his pistols and took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, and also took with him a pair of Frag Grenades, and then removed the container from the Mongoose and placed the container on the back of a Warthog and with that and his still present SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle in hand, he led the charge, the women following him while the others provided support fire. As soon as he got within 800 meters, he and the pirates who moved forward took defensive positions and unleashed massive support fire while taking turns in reloading their weapons. The women who were in the trenches

took that as their cue and left the positionâ€¦moving swiftly as best as they could ahead of the first group, they went another 800 meters and they then got into position and provided covering fire as the first team moved into position.

This move was known as leap-frog or in the older days of the Second World War as island hopping, however this version was used in a special attack where one element would move forward, establish a defensive perimeter and keep the enemy pinned down and prevent them from attacking the second element, which would then move forward and set up their own perimeter and cover the first element as they moved towards the enemy and would set up another perimeter to cover the second element which would then do the same. This would allow the fire teams to protect one another while still being on the move and keeping the enemy from overwhelming the advancing forces on their side.

The Spartan provided powerful support fire from his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle as he checked the progress and gave the nod as the NCOs of fire team Charlie, and fire team Bravo, namely Sheena and Hilda said that they had set up and were providing support fire. The Spartan nodded and then ordered the members of Fire Teams' Alpha, Delta, Eagle and Fox who were with him and their own NCOs to move ahead. There were also members of the four fire teams with Charlie and Bravo who supported their members as the Spartan took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and led the charge.

The Spartan moved quickly, and due to his augmentations was already ahead of the women and provided the needed support fire. The other women got to see him in action and were in awe. In their training camp, he had restrained himself from going all out with his abilities as a Spartan, but they were now seeing up close and personal how he would fight in a real battle field and it was impressiveâ€¦he ran ahead of the women and when he fired his weapons, it was a blur of speed, but they saw the deadly power he had as Harvester Troopers that were in his line of fire were hit hard and were badly mauled by the weapons fire he had with him. He provided the covering fire as they moved to his position, using the ground and rock outcroppings as cover for their own approach and when they were in position, they got into firing position and lent their support fire to the Spartan. He then took out one of his Frag Grenades and tossed it high, and right into a mass of Harvester Troopers. The resulting explosion tore apart those deep in the blast radius and killed them, while damaging the rest due to the shrapnel. He then took out his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle while placing the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle on his back, he and the others provided the support fire while the other team moved in.

The Warthogs left the temporary foxholes and their gunners provided heavy support fire on the move, careful not to get in front of either Scorpions' or the Fire teams' areas of fire, their M41s and the Gauss Cannons added extra fire to ensure that their comrades were well protected while shredding the opposition. While the Scorpion Tanks blasted away and tore down even more of the Harvester Troopers.

The entire battle was already five to eight minutes long but it was the most intense fire-fight the women had ever been in as they made their way to the Shield Tower that they had to take down, they knew that not only will it weaken the shield network protecting the installation but it will allow the Longswords to provide them air

support. The entire battle field was filled with bullets and the vapor trails of the Gauss rounds, the Scorpion Tank rounds, the vapor trails of the APFSDS rounds of the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifles, and the smoke trails of the rockets of the M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launchers and the bright lights of the plasma fire from the Harvester forces.

The pirates were doing well as they advanced onwards, but that certainly didn't mean that they got away from injury as several women were hit by the plasma fire and shouted in pain as the burning sensation hit them hard and forced them to drop and move to avoid the remaining blasts of fire, they were bleeding from the wounds on areas that were not totally protected by the Marine Armor they were wearing. The armor held on when it was hit, but it was showing signs of melting as well. The others got their wounded comrades and moved on, while others bit back the pain as adrenaline filled their bodies and they pushed onwards.

Even the drivers of the Warthogs and Scorpions were far from safe as they avoided massive barrages of plasma fire, they knew that standing still was a promise of being cut down plasma fire, but they got injured either way, one of the drivers was hit by several fragments of white hot stone which was super heated by the plasma and she got hit by a straw plasma bolt to the leg, melting her thigh armor plating and burning her leg, forcing her shout in pain, while the gunner got hit by half of a plasma bolt to the left side of her body, her Marine Armor holding the blow, but she gets hit by hot shrapnel on the thigh that was not blocked by her body armor, she shouted in pain as she managed to remain upright and fire her M41. They were then forced to abandon the vehicle when the two of them were forced to stop as neither of them could drive the vehicle and left the Warthog, but not before getting as much ammunition and weapons as they could carry. They were able to escape from the now abandoned Warthog as it was destroyed by a concentrated barrage of plasma bolts and they were then rescued when one of their comrades driving a Scorpion Tank acted as their shield from enemy fire and escorted them long enough for a pair of Warthogs to pick them up and move ahead.

Another driver have to turn to avoid crashing into a nearby boulder as she had been temporarily blinded by a plasma bolt that exploded in front of her Warthog's wind-shield, She recovered and managed to avoid another barrage, but the plasma bolts hit her tires, and while the tires held from the attack, they were eventually punctured and that left it vulnerable, forcing the driver to abandon the vehicle and cover her companion who was using the Gauss cannon, she was then hit by a plasma bolt on the right shoulder, making her shout in pain at the burning sensation and forced her to place aside her MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and take out her M7 Caseless Sub Machine Gun, her companion was marginally wounded by stones and managed to get her companion and escape, before their vehicle was hit by a massive plasma bolt shower and it exploded as the armor collapsed. They were approached by another Scorpion and the two moved alongside the tank until the more wounded one was taken on the passenger seat of another still functional Warthog and the marginally wounded one of the pair rode on the tank and got into the Scorpion's turret to ride the secondary guns

One more Warthog was hit by several bolts of plasma that sheared off the armor plating on the front of the Warthog and that forced the

driver to stop as the smoke coming from the damaged vehicle's engine was blinding her and forced her to get off the vehicle, she was then hit by a plasma bolt to the left side, with the Armor holding and preventing further injury. She managed to get her weapon and some ammunition while her comrade was able to protect them using the still functional Gauss cannon, but no longer functioned after she fired another batch of rounds, showing them that the damage was extensive to the engine. The two got their weapons and beat feet before the Warthog exploded as it's hydrogen fuel cells exploded, sending the now destroyed Warthog into the air. They were not badly wounded and were able to link up with the others.

One Scorpion was hit by multiple plasma bolts but held on as it continued to fire and decimate the Harvesters, but the tank was hit by the Harvester forces constantly and the damage was increasing and they were getting closer to it and that would mean that it would soon be overwhelmed. The driver knew that there was a blind spot on the range and kill zone of the Scorpion and the Harvesters were soon going to get to that, as more and more of them kept coming. She then moved back at full reverse and fired her cannon at will, taking out more of the enemy—but that was when she made a mistake and smashed into a large outcropping of rock and seeing that she was running out of time, she abandoned her Scorpion, but not before setting a good amount of Frag and Napalm Grenades with a timer, she got out and used her BR55HB SR Battle Rifle to attack the enemy and moved away to a nearby ditch and held her foes off until she was rescued by a Gauss Cannon armed Warthog and she ran to the Passenger seat and got onboard, but not before being hit by a plasma bolt that sheared the right side of her helmet—thankfully the helmet held on and she was alive, but she had to ditch it as it was too badly damaged to be of much help to her now. The Warthog got out of the area and when the Harvester Troopers were overwhelming the tank, the timer went off and the explosion destroyed a large number of the Harvester Troopers as the shrapnel flew in all directions from the now ruined Scorpion Tank.

The Spartan and his forces moved on and fought past another large force of Harvester Troopers as the bullets and plasma bolts flew all over the place. He then moved ahead and took out several more of the Harvester Troopers with his SRS99D-S3 AM Sniper Rifle, hitting them right in the hearts and tossed his next grenade into another group that attacked him. The Spartan took cover as best he could when his shield was reaching the middle area of the energy gauge, and waited for it to recharge. As soon as it did so, he took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and unleashed a massive barrage of ammunition on the Harvester Troopers that were close to him and quickly reloaded his weapon while under cover.

The Fire Teams that were with the Spartan and the ones in the second group were able to hold back the Harvester Troopers, even as more Transports of the Troopers were coming in to unleash more of the units on them—and they were still supported by the Warthogs and the remaining Scorpion Tanks. The women were still getting used to the battle as the fighting had just dragged on towards lasting for fifteen to twenty minutes, short to others, but for soldiers fighting on the ground, it felt like a life-time had passed them by as the smell of gunpowder, propellant, ozone, burning metal and fuel, and even the smell of flesh burns filled the air. The women sucked it up as they focused on getting the job done as some of them were using M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launchers and their missiles to bombard the

Harvester Troopers and decimate them as they were in the field. The Harvesters did leave a significant fighting force to protect the installation, but considering the way they responded to the attacks the pirates and the Spartan launched, they were apparently not expecting a ground assault as they only had their Troopers and no sign of heavy weapons forces or any vehicle or air-craft support at all...just purely infantry and infantry transports.

The Spartan and his Fire Teams managed to bypass the large rock outcroppings that jutted around the Shield Tower and acted as a natural number of shields, and managed to overwhelm the guards near the Shield Tower. As they did so, the Spartan ordered his Fire Teams to set up a defensive perimeter a good distance away from the Tower as he took out his Assault Rifle and managed to enter the structure, he had used a Spoofer to open the door and found himself in a massive room and faced off with four Harvester Troopers, the first got I's face full of 7.62 x 51mm FMJ bullets and was ripped to shreds as the Spartan quickly moved and evaded the enemy fire. One of the Harvester Troopers advanced and tried to use it's left arm blade to kill the Spartan up close. However the Spartan moved aside and quickly struck a powerful blow to the neck of his foeâ€|making the very unpleasant sound of his foe's neck bonesâ€|or what passes as such to snap like a twig and he grabbed the corpse with one hand and turned it around to take the blows of the other Harvester Troopers.

The Troopers fired on, uncaring for the fact that they were shooting their own comrade and the Spartan took that to heart as he charged in and attacked, raising the left arm of the slain harvester Trooper and impaled the third Harvester Trooper with the still extended blade of it's slain comrade. He then kicked the body aside and smashed his Assault Rifle into the chest of the fourth Harvester Trooper, his augmented strength and the power boost by the Paeksis enhanced Mjolnir allowed the weapon to smash right into the chest of the bio-mechanical unit and he fired the weaponâ€|the result was obvious as the wall behind the Trooper was covered in the magenta colored fluid once moreâ€|along the bullet holes as the opponent dropped dead.

The Spartan then moved away, dropped his Assault Rifle and took out his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle from his back and fired the round right into the back of the second Harvester Trooper, the effect was that it sliced right through the two and right in the heart no lessâ€|killing the two and leaving them as corpses. The Spartan then moved towards the nearby door and managed to find an empty room with one lift, he took it and was taken down to a lower facility and he then enter another chamber with a massive computer terminal and four massive glowing energy rods in the four corners of the room, and one massive tube that appeared to be heavily shielded as wellâ€|and there was a massive flow of energy in the tube as well

"Wowâ€|that must be the main command center area, and those four rods must be the flow control systems for the power flow. Johnâ€|we need to take them offlineâ€|let me get a closer look at it."

The Spartan nodded and made it to the rods and Cortana studied it using her advanced uplink while still being on the Nirvana.

"Johnâ€|I need you to set up powerful explosives on all four control rods, once that's done, you need to disable the shielding that

protects the tube, with that done, we can kiss this Shield Tower good bye."

"Got it."

The Spartan got on the COM and contacted NCO Fiona who nodded with the Spartan's orders and got to the structure along with two of her comrades. They took out their demolitions equipment and got ready to blow the place sky high, namely the use of Thermite Carbon Cord, C-7 Foaming Explosive, and several cubes of C-12 Shaped Charge.

The women quickly but carefully placed the Thermite Cord around the rods to destroy them, they then placed the C-7 Foaming Explosive on the console and around the tube that provided the power and the cubes of C-12 Shaped Charge were placed in the facility to break it down quickly, once he was told by Fiona that they were in the clear, he ordered them to leave the area with him. The demolition squad left the area alongside the Spartan and high tailed it back to the defensive perimeter that was set up before. Once they were all in the area, he gave the order for Fiona and her teams to fire away.

The women nodded and hit the switches to their detonators.

The Thermite Carbon Cord ignited first and the intense heat they released melted right through the rods and caused the Tower to shake as the rods kept the controls for the energy flow stable and with them broken, the flow of energy was becoming very erratic, the C-7 was next to go boom as it destroyed the console and the tube, with the console destroyed and shielding down and without the control rods to regulate power flow, the energy began to increase and the C-12 Shaped Charge blew up as well all this happened in only a number of seconds to one minute.

Outside the result was explosive as the Tower's upper parts stopped rotating and the energy it created dissipated in a flash of light and then the Tower was cracked and explosions came out along with energy and fire from the cracks, parts of the Tower fell down and it then blew apart like can filled with plenty of fire crackers. And as predicted, the destruction of just one Shield Tower took down a section of the shield as the energy that covered them disappeared completely.

The Spartan waited as the fires died down and then ordered his forces to move to the remains of the Shield Tower and the debris that landed around it thankfully, the Nirvana ground forces were not caught in the blast or the debris that were flying about from the destruction of the Shield Tower but the Master Chief's Mongoose was crushed to nothing when one fragment of the Shield Tower smashed into the temporary fox hole that they were using before. He planned to use the location to set up a temporary defensive base as his teams had a lot of wounded that needed a safe place to be medically treated with the fires of the base dying down and the threat of another explosion already out of the picture as the remains had no power and fuel to burn, the place would serve well for now.

Despite the heavy fire from the advancing Harvester forces, the Spartan and his Fire teams arrived at the site and managed to find a path that allowed them to get the surviving Warthogs into the area and the Scorpions as well, with the tanks moving into the area while maneuvering through the debris and rock outcroppings. Once that was

done and defensive positions were now set up, he called in Cortana.

-----

"Cortanaâ€¦the section of the shield is down, we need air support down here ASAP."

"Roger that John, hang on down there, Long-swords are inbound!"

And true to Cortana's words, the Long-swords came into the battle field, helping the trapped pirates as they were being surrounded by the Harvester Troopers. The multi-purpose UNSC fighters unleashed their arsenals as massive barrages of it's 110mm rotary cannons, and it's 120mm guns, along with several salvos of the ASGM- 10 Missiles that while used normally to take out unshielded targets and engage space fighters such as the Covenant Seraphs, they would double as heavy ground weapons ordinance as well. The sounds of their weapons fire made the advancing Harvester units turn and look up before they got shredded, some of the Harvester platoons turned and fired their weapons, filling the sky with plasma bolts, but since their weapons were infantry sized only, they didn't have enough damage power to seriously endanger the Longswords, plus they were being attacked by a squadron, not a lone Longsword. The carnage was immense as massive explosions from the ASGM-10 missiles were seen along with massive mushroom clouds were seen, along with large geysers of sand and rock as the bullets from the guns of the Longswords tore up the place. That was followed by the destruction of the Harvester Troopers that tried to overwhelm the women and the Spartan. They were shredded and blown apart by the attacks and they were scattered all over the place, their bodies torn to shreds.

The women whooped out in relief and cheer as the Longswords came back for another strike and wiped out several more detachments of the Harvester forces.

"TAKE THAT YOU HARVESTERS!!!!"

"HOW DOES THAT FEEL?"

Some of the women even swore Megelian oaths as they witnessed the fall of their enemies and it was understandable as they were happy that the Harvesters got what they deserved. The medics in their fire teams treated the wounded. Thankfully, the armor plating of the Marine Armor protected their vital areas well, and while they were wounded from the burns of plasma fire, the medics were able to bring their own medical gear and treated the burns, along with the Megele medi-kits that they had with them along the UNSC medical Scanners. They were able to treat the burns as best they could and used the supplies of dermacortic steroids to heal the burn wounds, and the Megele medi-kits to help ensure that they were not scarred by the wounds, as they did still not want to suffer scars. The medics also used the painkillers in their supplies, including Polypseudomorphine to make the pain less intense for their comrades and while some of them were very much sickened by the wounds they sawâ€¦and the smell, they sucked it up as they knew that the lives of their comrades where on the line and therefore they could ill-afford to be squeamish, especially in a fire fight like this one.

The Spartan then looked through his SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle's



scope and in the direction of the power plants. He then got into contact with Cortana as he needed an update on the battle overhead.

"Cortanaâ€¦|what's the situation up there?"

-----

Back in Spaceâ€¦|

"TAKE THIS!!!!"

Hibiki and Dita said as they were in the VanDread they formed which was named VanDread Dita by the other pirates, they fired the cannons and destroyed several Cube Fighters and a Seed Ship while the Dreads and Cube Fighters were still fighting it out in space. The VanDread provided heavy support fire and also tore down any of the Cube Fighters that tried to stop it with the blades attached to the fore-arms.

Jura was still a bit miffed that her chance to combine with Hibiki was lost as Dita had taken the chance and merged with his Vanguard before she did, and she let her frustration out on the Harvesters as she took out three more with her Dread's cannons. Barnette likewise fired her Dread's missiles into the enemy and destroyed them and used her beam cannons to take out another Cube Fighter that was trying to blindside some of her comrades.

Meia smiled a bit as her Dreads were going a fine job and it was then that she spotted a massive barrage of missiles coming from the Nirvana and those missiles were able to\ destroy a large batch of Cube Fighters and several of the Seed Ships. She smiled a bit more as she realized that Cortana had been able to fire the weapons on the UNSC section of the Nirvana as support fire for the Dreads. It seemed that the Nirvana was now far from defenseless this time as the ship unleashed another Archer Missile Barrage. The Dread pilots and even Hibiki and Dita were surprised at the sight as they had thought that the Nirvana was unarmed, but now their ship was armed with a very deadly add-on of fire power.

In the bridge, Magno and Buzam gave Cortana the order to fire the Archer Missile Pods that were still stocked with missiles at the incoming Harvester forces to lessen the weight of responsibility on the Dreads. Cortana had been able to determine that the Archer missile pods were now fully loaded and ready to fight and the sight of the Nirvana firing a massive missile barrage was incredible. The missiles were of various payloads of explosives and their tracking systems were enough to take out large ships and when fired en masse the explosive results could shred smaller ships caught in the blast. Even though the Archer Missiles were not effective on the Covenant forces due to the ships of the alien theocratic alliance having effective counter-measures and point defense lasers as well, that and their shields as well, they proved to be very effective on the Harvesters as the ships they had present had no such shielding technology.

The Harvesters were stunned somewhat as they had not noted that the Nirvana had weapons and the Cube Fighters closed in to attack the ship. Even with the Longswords in the area along with several Dreads, the Cube Fighters managed to get in close and attackâ€¦|but they got a

surprise of their ownâ€|

As several sections on the Nirvana opened up and out came turrets armed with a pair of 50mm Point Defense Guns. The weapons were all controlled by Cortana as she activated the weapons to respond with the incoming threats of the Cube Fighters. The weapons used a special type of propellant that required no oxygen and had powerful bullet loads that were very numerous and nasty. The turrets were located on the sides near the arms with four on each armâ€| four more on the front of the Nirvana and four more on the lower sections and even four upside downâ€|and since they were able to move a full 360 degrees and cover the area they were located in and in a half sphere, they were able to shred the Cube Fighters like they were tin-foil, further making a direct attack by fighters on the ship to be a bit of a high risk as Cortana proved to be deadly accurate with either the Archer Missiles or the newly activated Point Defense Guns while she was in her AI form as the hulks of Cube Fighters around the Nirvana could attest to that.

Magno and Buzam had asked Cortana for the past few days before this mission if the rest of the UNSC weapons from the Forward Unto Dawn could now be used, and she nodded as she had been able to finally access all sections of the Nirvana that had been touched by the Paeksis. And the planning paid off as the Nirvana was now more than capable of defending itself. Cortana took the call from the Spartan and reported to him as she and the crew watched the battle on the ground from their connections to the recorders on the helmets of the Fire Teams and the live feed from the Spartan himself.

"We're okay here Johnâ€| the Harvesters are really coming in and they seem to be interested indeed in capturing us. The Dreads, Longswords and the Vanguard Hibiki's piloting are giving them a hell of a headache, plus the VanDread's down great."

Magno was busy coordinating the situation as she and Buzam watched as Gascogne left the ship and re-supplied the Dreads that called for re-supply, the Dreki taking a lot of punishment but holding strong as it was protected by the Longswords and the Dreads, The VanDread fired another blast from it's main cannons and destroyed several more Cube Fighters and Seed Ships. Buzam likewise kept track of the Harvester forces as the still active Clarion Spy Drones kept them informed of the Harvester forces. They then spotted the incoming reinforcements of Harvester units and detected the Urchin Vessels.

"Contact the Dreads, tell them we have more forces on the way, and this time they have Urchin Ships with them. Once the Urchins are seen, have VanDread Dita or VanDread Meia ready for combat with them!"

Buzam orders as soon as she was able to identify their numbers, and having seen the Urchin Ships in action, she knew that they were a deadly threat to not just the Dreads but the Nirvana as well.

"Roger!"

Meia shook her head and frowned a bit at the mention of Urchin Ships as that meant that she would have to combine once more with Hibiki to defeat themâ€|she knew the reason behind the merging, but was still not happy with having to work with menâ€|she out that aside as she

helped lead the Dreads on their attacks on the Harvesters. The entire area of space was filled with the ruined hulks of Cube Fighters and Seed Ships as the Dreads continued to hold the line and get the Harvesters' attention, while the Nirvana, with it's new weapon systems assisted the Dreads and defended itself from Harvester retaliation as the Cube Fighters were cut down and ripped apart before they could get close enough and break through the Nirvana's shields by the Point Defense Gun Turrets.

The Harvester forces realized that the Nirvana was NOT going to be an easy catch like the other ships they had already taken and unless they got the ship within range of the weapon they had on the surface, they would lose this new catchâ€|they hoped that the remaining forces they had on the surface would be able to deal with the ground forces dispatched by the Nirvana, the Harvesters knew that the pirates had already taken out one of the Shield Towers and they had to hurry before even more damage was suffered. They had spent too much time, resources, and labor to lose the installationâ€|they were not going to lose it now!

-----

On the groundâ€|

The Spartan nodded as Cortana filled him in on the situation, he was thankful that the Longswords that were taking care of the enemy for the moment held off the Harvester Troopers, allowing his Fire Teams the chance to take a breather and this allowed him to then assess his forces on the groundâ€|with the loss of three Warthogs, his Mongoose, and one of the Scorpions, they were a bit short on heavier fire power and vehicle supportâ€|and the women were soon going to be in a strait of ammunition loss. He could order them to pull backâ€|but that was a dumb idea as that would leave them vulnerable to retaliation by the Harvesters. They had to take the fight to the Harvesters and take out the installation ASAP. He then had an idea and quickly moved to one of the LRV Warthogs, the very same one that had his ammunition canister on hand.

He took it down and rummaged through the supplies and found plenty of ammunition and had the NCOs distribute the extra munitions to their team-mates, the spare bullets won't be enough, but it will have to do, he also found his still present M6G Magnums, and a pair of M7 Caseless Sub Machine Guns with a lot of spare clips â€|he then found what he was looking forâ€|

There were several Damage Packs and a good supply of C-7 Foaming explosives in their vacuum sealed containers, and one Fury TAC-nuke. The Spartan then decided to get this mission started as he eyes the main target. He knew that they still had a lot of firepower to get the job done as they had plenty of vehicles, but the wounded were his concern, they had to be out of here soon and leaving them was a bad idea.

He then formulated a plan and contacted his NCOs to gather around. Carla, Sheens, Hilda, Rena, Fiona, and Kara moved to the Spartan as he gave his orders.

"We need to take out that installation, while the Longswords deal with the Power Plants. I need you all to stay here while a small force is with me and reach the installation, we'll blow our way into

the facility and shut it down from the inside, I'll leave the others here to defend the wounded along with the remaining Warthogs and Scorpions, I only need a small vehicle force with me to cover us as we make our way there. I need you and the remaining members to keep the wounded safe and distract the Harvesters."

The NCOs took in the information and Kara spoke first.

"We might run out of ammunition sir."

"I know that, I have a plan for that as well. I'll contact Cortana and have her take the Albatross in and land near here to act as a base for you all until the installation is taken down. Once I have confirmation from Cortana that she can land the Albatross and it arrivesâ€¦I want you to get as much ammunition and supplies from the drop-shipâ€¦make sure to get the wounded in the Albatross as well. You have to make sure that the Albatross is not shot down, that's our only ticket off the planet until we have a spare Albatross made. Any questions?"

Kara and her comrades shook their headsâ€¦they knew what had to be done and were ready for it. The Spartan nodded and told them to gather the members of the fire teams that they could spare to meet up with him. As soon as the NCOs were on their way through the wreckage of the Shield Tower and the remains, he contacted Cortana.

"Cortana, can you control the Albatross and land it near the destroyed Shield Tower?"

"I can John, it'll be one hell of a trick though, I'll have the Longswords provide support fire for it, but you're ground team will have to cover it once it lands."

"Understood, get here as fast as you canâ€¦we need to get ready to leave and get the wounded out of here once the mission is complete."

The Spartan then turned to face the small band of pirates who were gathered by the NCOs and he briefed them on their mission roles, and made sure that they were able to tell the drivers of the Scorpions and the drivers and gunners of the Warthogs selected by the NCOs their new mission. He then ordered the members of Fiona's Fire Team Eagle to destroy the rear outcroppings of rock to make a safe landing zone for the arriving Albatross, and they did well enough, using the Thermite Carbon Cord to slice through the stone and move them aside with the aid of the tow winch of the Warthogs, it took less than three to four minutes for it all to be finished and they now had a good sized landing zone and extra room to move about. He was then able to spot the incoming Albatross and smiled as the Longswords came in and protected the massive transport. As soon as it landed, he and the Fire Team members that could be spared were able to go in and get the supplies they needed, including more medical equipment/supplies, ammunition, and spare weapons. The Spartan then took out several crates that contained Cortana's newly manufactured Covenant based weapons. The women had been given the training on how to operate these weapons in the two and a half months of training they had been given back in Camp Genesis and knew how deadly the weapons were. The Spartan knew that as well and he ordered the distribution of the weapons to the rest of the Fire Teams.

The weapons included Plasma Rifles, Plasma pistols, Carbines with their power packs, Particle Beam Rifles, Needlers with their respective munitions, and a few Fuel Rod Cannons and their ammunition belts. The new weapons, plus the extra ammunition for their current weapons meant that the pirate Fire Teams had just gotten a hell of a lot more deadly for the Harvesters to face alone. It didn't take very long for the Fire teams to be fully re-supplied and equipped, and the medics were able to take the wounded back to the Albatross for better safety and medical treatment.

As soon as that was done and the women were ready, the Spartan took his commando team and their vehicle support straight to the installation, using the terrain as cover, while the remaining women held their lines and waited for their NCOs to give them the firing order. As soon as the Harvesters were seen and they were once more on the move—the women waited as the Harvesters walked towards the newly set up kill zone once more. The Scorpions were hidden by the still burning wreckage of the destroyed Shield Tower, and were ready to rain merry hell on the Harvester ground forces, with the drivers of the Warthogs out and acting as spotters for their fire—with the surviving Warthogs ready to raise hell with their weapons—and the Fire Teams were fully restocked with ammunition and grenades, plus the new Covenant weapons.

The very first batch of Harvester Troopers to leave the smoke found themselves cut down by the weapons fire of the SRS99 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, the Type-50 Sniper Rifle System or known to all as the Particle Beam Rifle, the Type-51 known as the Carbine, and the BR55HB SR Battle Rifle. The Harvesters moved in and they were now greeted by not just bullets, gauss rounds, and rockets, but by plasma bolts, beam rifles, and fuel rod cannon bolts as the women unleashed another barrage of weapons fire right at the Harvesters at full force.

-----

The commando team under John-117's personal command—

The Spartan moved on foot and was moving like a green blur at the speeds he was moving in as he used the rock outcroppings as cover. He could tell that the fighting had begun once more and he hoped that the Fire Teams could keep the Harvesters occupied long enough for his team to move in and secure a position and get into the facility. He then got into contact with Cortana as he moved on and covered the arrival of the rest of the team under him.

"Cortana—are those Longswords still fully armed?"

"They are John, they still have plenty of their munitions left, why?"

"I need them to break into two teams, provide enough support fire to the ground teams to keep them safe and the others to destroy the power plants once I give the order. I've got a feeling those power plants are not the only source of power here."

"You think the installation has back-up power systems?"

"Possibly."

"All right then Johnâ€¦you be careful out there and make sure you and the others make it back here on the Nirvana alive."

"Don't worryâ€¦we'll all make it back."

The Spartan spotted several more Harvester Troopers in the area and quickly moved and attacked, moving through the rock outcroppings and firing his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and taking out a pair of the alien Troopers, but had to duck as several responding bolts of plasma fire pinned him down, but that was enough to distract the Harvesters and allow the rest of the commando team on foot to blast the Harvester Troopers before they knew that the Spartan was not alone. The bullets from the various weapons the women had on them cut down the Harvesters quickly, neatly, and efficiently and allowed the team to keep moving. The Spartan then spotted the installation, their main target and spotted a large band of Harvester Troopers moving out to reinforce their comrades. He quickly got into contact with the driver of the Scorpion Tank and used his COM system to spot for herâ€¦and the Spartan then gave the order to fire.

The sound of a massive shell firing out of the cannon slammed right into the alien forces and blew them to shreds, the Spartan was then armed with his pair of M7 SMGs and quickly moved in and was followed by the women who attacked the survivors of the Harvesters, while the Spartan was the one who charged ahead and took out the first pair of the Harvester Troopers with a hail of bullets and the harvester Troopers fell down in a bloody heap, their bodies filled with lead. The Spartan quickly crushed the head of another Harvester Trooper trying to get up with one stomp of his foot as it was trying to rise and fight backâ€¦even with both legs blown off and it's fluids spilled everywhere. Another got shredded by the Spartan as he fired the M7 SMG in his left arm right into it's face as it tried to attack with it's left arm blade, which the Spartan blocked with his right arm. As soon as the body fell, he aimed his right M7 right into another that tried to blindside him.

The women came in and they mopped up the survivors, the women holding their lunches in at the carnage as they quickly took out the Harvester Troopers that survived the blast from the Scorpion's cannon. The Spartan then told them to stand clear as he placed in the damage packs on the wall and set the timer. The commando team moved back and the sounds that resulted as the timers of the damage packs was horrendous as the walls of the installation had massive cracks and sections fell off the wall, even the ground shock from the blast itself and as soon as the smoke cleared, the Spartan ordered the rest of the team to cover the entranceâ€¦namely the Scorpion and the LRV Warthog with them, while the women who were on foot were given the order to follow him and to be careful.

"Make sure to shoot only if you can hit the target, don't waste ammunition."

"Yes sir!"

The Spartan was already armed with his Assault Rifle and his SMGs, while his companions were armed with MA5C ICWS Assault Rifles and M90A Shotguns. The five member squadron made their way into the massive hole of the facility and as they moved through, they had several fire fights with the remaining Harvester Troopers inside, the

women followed the Spartan's orders and conserved their ammunition and then when he gave the order to use grenades to dislodge any pesky Harvester Trooper behind any barriers. They fought their way to a nearby lift and then fought past several more levels and reached a massive deck filled with computers. The Spartan placed his hand and began to use the Mjolnir Mark VI's hacking abilities and downloaded the informationâ€”including the blue-prints of the facility.

"It seems you're right, there's a secondary underground power core in the facility to keep the thing running just in case the main power grid was taken offlineâ€”it's at least three to four stories down, the fourth story section above the main power core must be the one that houses main command nodes for the ground and space borne forces are locatedâ€”that means that this base is not only fully automated, it runs the entire blockade forceâ€”Johnâ€”we have to take this base out completely. This area only operates the main weapon system so we can just disable the energy net transmitters, we have to shut down the command nodes fast or else we'll be fighting these guys none stop."

"Got it, we're already on the move."

The Spartan wasted little time and quickly asked for a grenade and was handed one by one of the women, without waiting he punched a hole right into the console and stuffed the grenade inside and they moved out of the area. The console was destroyed by the internal explosion and the priming up process was taken offline by the grenade.

The Spartan contacted the defensive force and Hilda told him that they were still holding on the Albatross was not yet under attack, but things were getting very hectic as more Harvester Transports were coming, it was as if they had entire regiments down here on this planet. The Spartan told them to hold the line, relief was coming in very soon.

The Spartan and his forces continued their advance and he was able to contact their security team and found them to holding another advancing force and their vehicles were running out of protection. The Spartan told them to hold on as he and his team managed to fight their way past several more pairs of Harvester Troopers as bullets and plasma fire were traded back and forth, but they were not free without injury as one of the commandos took a direct hit to the stomach and while the armor held, the woman suffered several burns as the plasma hit her hard and was knocked down and had to be evacuated by one of her comrades while the others covered them, This left the team down to three as they made their way to the lift and made it to the fourth story section and as they moved in, they fought with more pairs of Harvester Troopers and they reached the main control hub, but the women were already too low on ammunition to be of much help to the Spartan and he ordered them to pull out now. The women hesitated for a second, but nodded and high tailed it back to the lift as the Spartan reached behind him and took out the last remaining containers of the C-7 Foaming Explosiveâ€”he had work to do.

In the chamber were three control nodesâ€”massive pillars of transparent screens with information traveling in nano-seconds on the sheet screens, these were his target as he went to work with the explosives.

-----  
In spaceâ€|

The Dreads were really busy as the Harvester Forces began to herd the Nirvana even with the horrendous losses they were suffering from the weapons the Nirvana now had on it's form. The Longswords with them had exhausted their ordinance and had to return to the Nirvana to resupply as they didn't have the weapons of the Dreads and therefore could not be resupplied in the same fashion as the Dreads by the Dreki. The Dreads were however supported by the VanDreads, and right now, VanDread Meia was in the battlefield.

The dragon-like VanDread had managed to smash right through a pair of Urchin Ships that tried to blind side it and destroy it as well. The high speed VanDread moved and engaged several more Cube Fighters and also attacked another batch of Urchin Ships that came on the scene, using the speed and acceleration to even up the odds and force the Urchin Ships to focus their attention on them rather than the Dreads and the Nirvana as they recalled what the first Seed Ships did to the Nirvana and the Dreads.

"Damn those guysâ€|they don't know when to quit!"

Meia had to admit that Hibiki was right and she hoped that the ground teams were already done with the fighting. Dita and Jura were also fighting with their Dreads and taking down several more Cube Fighters and made sure to back the others in their group up from attack. Several Dreads were already out of commission and were rescued by Gascogne while the reserve Dreads and pilots were sent into the fray, but they all knew that they had to hurry, even with all of their combined fire-power and equipment, they were not going to last foreverâ€|and it got even worse as the surviving Cube Fighters and Seed Ships were detected to be approaching them.

-----  
Back on the groundâ€|

Hilda and the rest of the Fire Teams were busy pouring it on as they each covered the other as they reloaded their weapons and maintained fire on the Harvester Troopers as the war machines continued their silent but brutal advance into their forces. The Warthogs and the Scorpions were firing with all of their arsenals with several key members acting as spotters to direct Scorpion cannon fire to support the strike team. However, they had gotten some more wounded as Carla, Fiona, Rena and Sheena were wounded, but thankfully not fatally as they were able to recover and were being treated by the medics. Only Hilda and Kara were left standing and were doing their best to keep their teams together and to not only distract the Harvester Troopers, but to protect both the Albatross and the wounded.

The entire field was filled with plasma fire on both sides, along with rockets, particle beams, needler crystals, bullets, DU rounds, Gauss rounds, and missiles as the fire teams held their own and fought the Harvesters who were being slaughtered but kept on attacking even if a large number of their comrades were already shredded and lay in messes near them. However, the two Fire Team NCOs knew that they might be overwhelmed soon as they were being whittled



down as another one of their comrades was hit on the shoulder and a medic rushed in to heal her wounds and keep her safe.

They only hoped that the Master Chief had accomplished his mission.

-----

In the installationâ€¦

The Spartan took out the electrical detonator and primed it as he used up all the C-7 Foaming explosive and primed them to explode once he was clear. He still had the Fury TAC nuke with him and it managed to avoid any damage as he made his way into the power chamberâ€¦there were several large pillars that were filled with what he recognized as liquid plasma, this was the back-up power core of the installation. But as he approached, he was attacked by four more Harvester Troopers, but one of them was about three times the size and shape of the three others and appeared to be stronger than the others. And it appeared to be of a different grade and armor color scheme, being deep blood red and silver in color.

The plasma bolts flew as the four Harvester Troopers open fired, with the larger Harvester Trooper firing short streams of plasma instead of bolts like the others. This forced the Spartan to change tactics as he used the various obstacles as cover as plasma bolts and beams were everywhere. His shields took the damage as he fought on with the four units and he was able to even up the odds somewhat as he took down one of the Harvester Troopers and managed to wound the other two. But they kept on coming like zombies as the Spartan reloaded his MA5C with a fresh clip. However, he moved quickly away as the blade of one of the Harvester Troopers came too close to cleaving his weapon in half. He managed to move away and save his weapon and kicked the Harvester Trooper hard in the stomach and forced it back and followed up with a burst of bullets in the face. The second managed to force John-117 to drop his Assault Rifle and it attacked once more, but the Spartan blocked with his arms and grabbed the left arm and with all of his enhanced strengthâ€¦tore the arm clean off in a shower of magenta colored fluid that covered the floor and he quickly punched the Harvester Trooper with intense forceâ€¦crushing the side of it's head. This left the Spartan facing the bigger and stronger looking Harvester Trooper. The new unit released not one bladeâ€¦but two and quickly attacked the Spartan, forcing John-117 to rely on his close combat training as he avoided the unit's slashes, the blades grazing his chest and flaring his shields. The Spartan dodged a powerful slash to his neck and then shoulder charged the unit forcing it back. He followed through and slammed his body right into the new Harvester Trooper type and took out his M7 and fired at point blank rangeâ€¦splattering even more of the magenta colored fluid. The Spartan looked about and when he was sure that he was not being ambushed again, he placed back his M7 and took up his discarded MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and walked over to the massive liquid plasma power cores and then took out the Fury TAC nuke and set it to detonate in eight minutes. He then moved out of the facility as fast as he could.

As soon as he was at the surface, he gathered his strike team and ordered the Longswords to buy time for them and the rest of the Fire Teams as he and his commando squad made their way back at top speed, forcing them to leave the Scorpion behind. The Spartan and his forces

made it back to the location and he ordered all the wounded and the Fire teams to pull back as the Longswords that were not assigned to attack the Power Plants used the last of their ordinance to aid in the evacuation of their comrades. The first onboard were the fire teams and the wounded personnel, along with whatever was essential. This included all the leftover munitions and weapons and he also determined the vehicles that had to be left behind as they would not be helpfulâ€|but since the rest were still functional, they were all taken,

As soon as the still functional Warthogs and Scorpions were brought in as the Harvester Troopers were disabled since before he took to the cockpit, the Spartan pressed the detonator and the C-7 Foaming Explosive blew apart the control nodes in the fourth floor. The results were explosive as every Harvester unit both on the groundâ€|and in space went offline. As soon as he was assured that the fire teams and the wounded were all strapped in and were going to be safe, he ran a quick check and when he was told that all the systems were in good condition he then activated the Albatross' engines and punched the ship to it's limits at full speed as Cortana guided him. The engines were designed for rapid acceleration and the Albatross quickly gained altitude like it was an ICBM taking off from a silo. That was when the surviving Longswords attacked the power plants and the results were explosive as the Fury TAC nuke also detonated at the very same time.

The destruction of both the power plants and the facility's back up power supply resulted in a massive explosion that could be seen even in space as the Dreads detected the massive plasma energy discharge on the surface on the planet. The entire facility was brought down as it collapsed from the explosions inside of it as the Fury TAC nuke exploded and destroyed the back-up plasma power cores, resulting in a combined explosion that both blew the place up like a geyser but sent the entire structure crashing. The destruction of the power plants outside further added to the destruction as they detonated like thermonuclear bombs and glassed the entire surface of the battle-zoneâ€|the remaining Shield Towers were incinerated into atoms and the ground was turned into glass, and all deactivated Harvester units were reduced into nothing but atoms as the Albatross and the Longswords escorting it left the atmosphere.

As soon as the shaking stopped and the artificial gravity systems were activated, the Spartan and Cortana checked the Fire Teams and found them to be all in good condition and were all safe. That was a relief and an even bigger one as no one was left behind, they were all going home.

This gave the Spartan a sense of relief as he tapped the communications.

"This is Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan II John-117. The mission is successfulâ€|no losses, all Fire Team members and NCOs are alive and accounted for."

In the bridge, the cheering of the women was loud as they knew that their friends were safe as they were holding their breath at the sight of the battle below. The rest of the Nirvana pirates cheered and breathed a sigh of relief as they had won this battle. The same could be said for the Dread pilots as they were relieved that their comrades made it back safe and alive.

Hibiki was smiling widely as he guided his Vanguard alongside the Albatross, along with him was Dita who was cheering at how cool it was to have both Mr. Aliens in their group. Hibiki sighed and complained that he was not an alien, while this made the Spartan smile slightly in amusement. He then contacted the Medical Bay.

"Better get ready there Doctor, we've got a lot of wounded up here."

-----

Back on the Nirvana, hours later.

Magno and Buzam walked around the Medical Bay and were thankful as Duero told them that the wounded would all recover and be back on their feet without any scarring. The elderly woman was happy that the crews were all safe and sound, and she was also full of pride that they had pulled off the impossible and accomplished their first ground mission with success.

She was relieved that all of the female ground teams made it back safe and sound from the battle and were not fatally injured. And she had been a witness to the fighting as well as the others since they were given access to the helmet recorders by Cortana. They were amazed at how the battle had turned out as the ground teams had suffered no losses, but had plenty of injuries to go with it. The elderly woman felt that her decision to have the Spartan act as commanding officer for the ground teams was the right decision as the women were recovering and would soon be back on their feet in a matter of a few weeks.

The information the Spartan retrieved from the now totally destroyed installation proved invaluable as the maps told them of paths that the Harvesters used to ply their operations to harvest the organs of humans, and the maps would allow their ship to avoid areas which were too well defended for a strike by either their Dreads, by the VanDreads or by the ground teams. This minimized the risk of ambushes on certain paths, and while the elderly Captain knew that they Harvesters would not forget the destruction of the installation, and that they would always be pursued by the aliens, as long as they were all together, they would survive.

The elderly woman and the commander turned as the Spartan walked in, still wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI but bare of his helmet as he and Cortana moved over and he gave his wounded fire team members his commendations for them doing well on their first mission and his best wishes for them all to recover and be back on their feet. The female Fire Team members, including NCOs Carla, Fiona, Rena, and Sheena all saluted the Spartan and smiled that they all made it through.

In John's mind, they did well and he was happy that no one died, and he would make sure that they would make it through. He had no doubt that the Harvesters would not give up so easily after this staggering tactical defeat. He knew one thing from his many years of being a soldier, the battle here was won, but the war with the Harvesters was not.

It was far from over.

-----  
To be continuedâ€

Author's notes:

Well, that wraps this baby upâ€|sorry about the long delay in updatesâ€|I got swamped by a lot of extra paper work and therefore didn't have enough time to put updates as frequently as I normally did, so please excuse me for the delays. Anyway, I hope that the ground battle was worth it, and if there are any flaws, please be nice enough to tell me in advance.

This will only be the opening battle, there will be more soon, and they will be even greater in danger and risk for the ground teams. Plus you can bet that the Harvesters will now be focusing a good portion of their efforts to thwart the Spartan and his ground teams from their missions.

Plus the new weapons on the Nirvana can only be used by Cortana as they are all UNSC based weapons. I figured that giving the Nirvana the ability to defend itself can add some extra spice to the story. The Archer Missile Pods and the 50mm Point Defense Gun Turrets are the starting weapons along with the MAC guns that are incorporated by the Paeksis into the Nirvanaâ€|effectively turning it into a warship. However that does not mean that Bart will only be the navigator alone, as he will also be able to contribute to the defense of the Nirvana soon enough, plus add to the combat power of the Shipâ€|

Until then, Cortana will be the one to handle the deployment of the Longswords, and the defense of the ship, while the Master Chief will be the one to deal with the boarders just in case the boarding craft manage to evade Cortana's use of the guns.

The next mission will be familiar to you readers if you've watched the anime, and this time, Hibiki is taking the driver's seat. We're going to see what else he has learned under the Spartan and how mature he has become.

Trailer:  
-----

Hibiki growled as he looked over the information on the battle-field they were in, There was no way they could go in the area with Dreads, plus even the VanDreads would not be of much helpâ€|there was too much environmental hazards to deal with.

(I've got to thinkâ€|there as to be a solution here somewhereâ€|)

It was when he listened to the last of Jura's voice that he got an idea. If the Harvesters were so intent of using the environment as a shieldâ€|then what was going to stop them from turning the environment into an asset as well?

Only in his mind, the environment was not going to be a shieldâ€|but

a weapon.

-----

See you on Chapter 8 " Choices and Plans

## 9. Chapter 9

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: I own neither VanDread nor Halo, I merely use them to make stories such as this one right now.

## Chapter 8

### Choices and Plans

( ): Thoughts

-----

In space|

The Nirvana was now in one of what appeared to be one of the most daring battles she had faced before. The pirates had dealt with constant attacks for at least several weeks now and those one was the most recent. They had been making their way to their home system when they were suddenly ambushed by the Harvesters near a planet with massive storms on it's surface|near a massive asteroid belt.

The Harvesters had sent out a massive force of Seed Ships, Cube Fighters, and one new high speed attack unit that seemed to be totally at home in the asteroid field, out-pacing and out-running even the quick and nimble Megele interceptors. The fighter took advantage of the fact that the Dread required plenty of room to maneuver and it's smaller profile and mass gave it the speed and edge to leave the women in the dust, and it had already taken out a number of the women pilots|including one pilot in particular.

-----

In one of the corridors heading to the Medical Bay|

"CLEAR THE WAY!!!"

Duero shouted as he once more checked his new and critical patient|who was none other than Meia Gisborn. She had been trying to take out the alien Harvesters' latest fighter on her own, but the Fighter proved too agile even for her and it had taken advantage of the area and got her dead on as it struck her Dread at the cockpit. The alien fighter would have finished her off had it not been chased off by Hibiki and Dita who came on the scene.

They quickly towed the damaged fighter as it leaked coolant and parts and were horrified to see that Meia was wounded and unconscious. Hibiki had called the Nirvana to tell them that Meia had been wounded and that was a bad sign for the female officers. As the gunnery that carried Meia was being wheeled into the Medical Bay, Duero McFile

went to diagnose his patient's injuries as he was accompanied by Hibiki, Dita, and one of the Dread pilots in Meia's team.

"She has several broken bones, a ruptured spleen, several head wounds and a severe concussion."

The women looked on worriedly while Hibiki couldn't help but lash out at the Dread pilot as he had been in the area when the attack happened. The Tarak teen was decked in his marine Body Armor to protect himself from injury while in his Vanguard's cockpit and thus was not yet wheeled into the Medical Bay himself.

"You idiot! What were you thinking trying to take that thing all by yourself?! You were too rash!"

Meia looked at the moving lights and then to Hibiki and Dita, both of whom were speaking to her—the aqua haired woman however paid little attention as her mind began to drift back to her past, her life long before she had ever joined the pirates Magno had founded. She recalled her parents, her fahma and ohma and the incident that changed her life all those years ago. She recalled the things she saw, her ohma giving her something, and watching her fahma standing before a field of red, a barren place with a red sky. She saw her fahma's face smiling at her while wearing a hat.

Then she saw a massive explosion in a city, she recalled seeing herself in a mirror and feeling more and more alone.

Duero noted the sudden changes in Meia and realized how dangerous her situation was unless she was brought to the Medical Bay ASAP. He turned and quickly gave a sharp command to the patients and Paiway.

"Clear the treatment table!"

Duero proceeded to remove Meia's flight suit, chest and shoulder padding, unmindful of seeing Meia naked and her breasts in front of him, he was concerned in keeping his patient alive at all possible cost while Paiway herself moved in to help the Tarak medic. All the while, Meia lost her head piece and her eyes look up to the ceiling, while uttering one word.

"Mother!"

-----

Back outside, the fight was getting a lot more complicated as the lone alien fighter and it's forces continued it's blinding assault in the Nirvana. The shields of the pirate warship held on the Point Defense guns were firing at the alien fighter while dicing up the Cube Fighters that tried to get close to the Nirvana. The Dreads tried their best to take out the Harvesters, but with Meia out of the mission, it fell to Jura to command the Dread teams.

However, Jura had no prior experience in leading the Dreads on missions since Meia had always been the one to lead the Dreads and their pilots in every mission the women had ever been part of and as such she had little to no time to lead the Dreads and learn how to do it. Thus she had no idea what to do.

"A-Team engage formation Alpha one! B-Teamâ€¦umm."

The results were obvious as the blonde woman's orders resulted in even more confusion as the Harvesters took direct advantage of the situation, with the alien fighter breaking into the Dread ranks and causing nothing but panic in the Dread pilots.

Barnette quickly called in to Jura and spoke out as their group barely avoided being blasted by the Harvesters, while avoiding the massive barrage of asteroids coming their way.

"Jura! Get a hold of things! The formations you're ordering aren't working here!!!"

"I knowâ€¦I knowâ€¦butâ€¦"

The blonde pilot closed her eyes as her shields block another attack from the Harvesters as she tried to think of a way to salvage the situation.

She wasn't the only one as the Other Dread Team leaders, who had grown used to following Meia's orders were also in a panic on what to do without Meia commanding them. The officers on the Nirvana, namely Buzam and Magno listened into the communications from the Dread Teams.

"C-Team Return to formation!"

"Where is everyone?!"

"Who in the hell is leading?!"

"We need some help up here!"

Buzam could only shake her head and mentally grieve as the Dread Squadrons were falling apart at the seams. And she looked at how organized the Harvester forces were now as they engaged the Dreads in combat.

"To think they would have a fighter organization."

And things on the Nirvana were far from pleasant either. Cortana couldn't fire either the MAC guns and the Archer Missiles as they would no doubt be useless in the situation they were currently in and the fact that the Dreads were out there made the use of the more deadly weapons in her arsenals out of the question. That and the fact that her Longswords were unable to leave the area due to the Hanger bay being hit made her a\unable to reinforce the Dreads.

"First rear shield lost!"

Belvedere reported as the Nirvana was rocked by another powerful explosion as more Harvester contacts were on approach.

"The attack of the Harvesters is centered on the main lower hull!"

Amarone reported as she also tracked the Harvester attacks on her station.

Even in the Register, the situation was far from calm as the stress of the battle bled it's way into the Register and it's own staff. Gascogne however kept things cool and working fine as she reminded them that panicking was not going to solve things right now.

The only bands of pirates who were on top of things were the Nirvana Fire Teams under the Master Chief's command as they were assigned to ship defense as they moved in the ship, wearing their Marine Body Armor and wielding their respective weapons which were all made for close to medium ranged combat, namely the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, the M90A Shotgun, the M7 Caseless Sub Machine Gun, the Needler, the Plasma Rifle, the M7S Sub Machine Gun, the BR55HB SR Battle Rifle, the M6G Magnum, the Carbine, the Tarak Assault Rifles, and even the Plasma Pistols. They also carried with them the newly upgraded Megele Laser Rifles which Parfet had been able to modify to cause more damage than before in order to overpower the passive shield coatings that the Harvester Shock Troopers are known to have on them.

The Harvesters used the asteroids as cover to send small waves of boarding craft at the Nirvana and while Cortana was able to destroy them with the Nirvana Point Defense Guns under her command, some managed to bypass her defensive fire zone and make it to the Nirvana. However, if she failed to kill them, the UNSC woman in her AI form would quickly coordinate with the Spartan and his Fire Teams to head off the Harvester Shock Troopers when they were boarding the Nirvana. The alien troopers were expecting their multiple attacks to catch the women off guard, despite their losses in getting into positionâ€|

They were not counting on the fact that the women were expecting them and were already prepared to fight back with the training and ferocity the Spartan gave them. The Spartan had also taught the women on the techniques and tactics involving ship defense apart from ground operationsâ€|thus they were more than ready to counter the Harvester boarding parties. And when the Spartan was there with his own weapons, things were going to get very nasty for the Harvester boarding parties.

The women NCOs of the Fire Teams were doing an impressive job as they each led their Fire Teams as they all prepared traps and set up ambushes that quickly caught the Harvesters and their Shock Troopers off guard as the Spartan would lead them into battle, allowing them to rapidly engage and neutralize the boarding parties of the aliens before they became a threatâ€|with Cortana doing her best to aid them along the way. And even if the Spartan was not with them, the Fire Teams did a good job in holding the line and finishing off the threats in their area of responsibility.

Unlike the Dread Squadrons who relied heavily on the leadership of Meia, the Fire Teams were able to operate interdependently and didn't always have to rely on the support of the Spartan as he and Cortana coordinated them in their actions. The Spartan had made a lot of effort to train the NCOs in leadership and team tactics and after their successful operation with no losses on their Fire Teams, the women officers who worked with the Spartan were eager to learn all they can from the UNSC Super Soldier and overall commander of the Spartan IIs. They still wanted the Master Chief around to back them up just in case things got too dicey, but they wanted to prove to the other pirates, themselves, and to the Master Chief that they will do their absolute best to accomplish their missions. Plus the Spartan



encouraged them and the other Fire Team members to be independent thinkers to increase their combat effectiveness, initiative, and skills to adapt to the rapidly changing situation.

The security teams who were not part of the Fire Teams were impressed at how their comrades seemed to move and respond, along with using UNSC weapons, Tarak weapons, their Megele built weaponry and the Covenant ones as well. They had always thought the weapons of the men of Tarak were junk, and so were the UNSC weapons, but seeing how effective and deadly they were in the hands of their comrades who were trained in their use by the Spartan, began to make them change their minds.

For every success that they were able to pull off, the Fire Teams were able to send their reports directly to the bridge as the portraits of Kara, Carla, Sheena, Hilda, Fiona, and Rena appeared to give their reports, along with the Spartan.

"This is Fire Team Bravo! All hostiles have been eliminated and we're sealing off this section of the ship!"

"Fire Team Eagle here! The Harvesters are out of the picture! They won't be coming here anytime soon!"

"This is Spartan-117, Harvester contacts on deck 5 have been eliminated."

"Fire Team Fox here! Port Arm Deck 3 is secure, the Harvesters have been pushed back!"

"Fire Team Alpha reporting in! All hostiles have been taken out, minimal casualties suffered, we're pulling back to secure secondary defensive positions."

"Fire Team Charlie reporting in! Zero casualties here and the Harvester boarding party out of the picture! They won't be coming through here!"

"Fire Team Delta checking in! We've secured the area and all Harvesters have been taken out, moving to next position."

The Spartan then commanded the women to move out as they were getting ready for more boarding parties heading their way. The women nodded and moved out to engage the Harvesters once more in combat.

Magno and Buzam were kept up to date on the progress of the Fire Teams and their Spartan Commander by Cortana who coordinated their rapid response to Harvester boarding parties and their craft that managed to bypass her defenses. And they had to admit, that while the Fire Teams were not out there flying Dreads, they did an excellent job in halting the Harvesters before they could gain enough momentum to strike them fast and hard within the ship. They however were only seven teams and while they were doing their best to keep the Harvesters from winning in their own way—unless they found a way to take out the Harvesters soon, they were going to be in serious trouble—especially with the Dreads scattered and disorganized.

Bart was also panicking as he lashed out his arms while shouting.

"NO! GET AWAY! STAY AWAY FROM ME!!!!"

Magno however had one underlying thought as the battle outside began to get even more desperate for them. And that particular thought was centered on a certain Dread Squadron Leader who was still being treated in the Medical Bay

(Meiaâ€|hold on, don't you dare give up now.)

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|

"Paiway! We need the oxygen saturation levels balanced, we have to prevent Meia from going into shock!"

"Right!"

Duero and Paiway were doing their absolute best to keep Meia from losing her life while they treated her various injuries and they were working around the clock. There were reports from Cortana on the PA system that warned them of incoming Harvester boarding parties, thankfully the Spartan and his Fire Teams did an admirable job in keeping the Harvesters from overwhelming the entire ship and made sure to prevent the Harvester Shock Troopers from causing massive damage to the ship. Pyoro observed the whole thing, but made sure to keep out of the way as he had no idea on how to help the doctor and the nurse.

-----

Out in spaceâ€|

"We can't let things like this!!!"

Barnette shouted as the Harvesters continued to press the offensive with their new fighter taking the lead, the Dreads were getting creamed and even further broken down, they all tried their best to take down the alien fighter, but the thing was just too quick for them to mount a proper counter attack. Barnette quickly contacted Jura in order to form a plan.

"Jura! We need a plan now! Jura!"

However, the blonde woman was no longer in a position to lead as she had reached her breaking pint.

"Shut up! Don't ask me anything!"

Hibiki managed to take out several more of the Cube Fighters but was interested in taking out the alien fighter that was the current leader of the whole bunch to end this whole mess before it got out of hand, but he knew for a fact that there was no way his Vanguard could ever hope to capture the fighter in an ambush, let alone chase it since it moved too quickly for him to get a good clean hit.

He knew that the VanDread his Vanguard formed with Meia had more than enough power and acceleration to handle that problem and the alien forcesâ€|but knowing that Meia was out like a light right now and

being treated in the Medical Bay meant that idea was out of the question and this meant that he would have to improvise. If they couldn't chase after the fighter, they might as well try and blow it to kingdom come—and the only way to do just that was to combine his Vanguard with Dita's Dread.

Hibiki quickly contacted Dita as he moved to get himself some room and to make sure that his Vanguard's comm.-systems were working properly.

"We need to combine to take out that thing!"

Dita was a bit surprised at that, as normally Hibiki was not the kind to combine when he wanted to as he preferred to settle battles on his own terms. This was naturally the very first time he was willing to combine with anyone, let alone her.

"Uh—sure!"

The Dread and Vanguard quickly fused together and out came the massive mecha and they immediately defeated several more Cube Fighters as they tracked the alien fighter as fast as they could manage. The mecha was far from being the most effective choice for speed, but it made due with deadly firepower and that might as well play a part in taking out the alien fighter and stopping the Harvester ambush cold in it's tracks.

Inside the cockpit of the fused machine, Hibiki activated the targeting systems and closed in on the alien machine, the Tarak youth nodded and began to lock in as the alien fighter began to slow down long enough for the targeting systems to lock on but it still needed the alien fighter to hold still for a few more moments.

"Come on—hold still—what the?!"

Hibiki was forced to break the lock-on when the blasted alien fighter moved away and the asteroid that it was in front of barreled in front of the VanDread, forcing Hibiki to move the machine out of the way lest it would be destroyed. The VanDread's armor was good, but there was no way it could be able to withstand a direct collision from an asteroid that size. As soon as he was able to right the mecha, the Tarak youth growled.

"Damn—with all these asteroids in the way, we can't lock on and take the damn thing out of the picture! Unless we force that fighter out of this asteroid field, we can't finish this fight."

It was then that Jura came on the scene with her Dread, the blonde was not in the best of moods as her plans had thrown the Nirvana's Dread Squadrons in disarray and broke down their offensive on the alien Harvesters. She was angry and needed to vent out her frustration—and naturally since Hibiki was nearby—he became the target of her ire.

"Nice going! You had that thing and you didn't take it out?! Is that all you smart aleck Tarak males are capable of doing?"

Hibiki felt the anger rise in him too and he naturally bit back at Jura's words.

"Look who's talking?! You couldn't even lead the Dreads if you're life depended on it! Before you try lecturing me about what I am capable of doing, you try to actually lead the Dreads first instead of breaking down like a bloody sissy!!!"

Naturally, Jura reacted with anger as Hibiki's words were close to the truth.

"Shut the hell up! I don't need a MAN to tell me what to do!"

"Oh yeah?! Listen here!"

"Hibiki! Jura! That is enough!"

The two stopped their argument as the Spartan appeared on their communication screens with his Mjolnir Armor on. Despite not being able to see inside the polarized visor, the Tarak teen could tell that his mentor was not in the best of moods right now.

"Fighting with one another won't change this situation" Hibiki, get back to the Nirvana and recharge ASAP."

Hibiki nodded as he respected the Spartan and despite being insulted by Jura, he pulled away. The Spartan then spoke to Jura next.

"Jura" you have to pull back too" your Dread has to refuel and re-charge"

"Shut up! I don't take orders from you! So don't start giving me orders you crazy freak!"

The Spartan was hardly troubled by the anger Jura displayed in front of him or the insults, he had dealt with far worse than this and he showed it as well.

"You don't need to" I'm giving you some advice."

The Spartan cut the comm. link between him and Jura as he went back to his duties as he and his Fire Teams cleared out the last remnants of the Harvester boarding parties. Sections of the Nirvana were soaked in the fluids of the Harvester forces that the Fire Teams had taken out and their bodies were still there as well. The Spartan directed them to protect the key areas of the Nirvana" the Medical Bay, the Engineering section, the Hangers, the Crew quarters and the command bridge, and despite the women being somewhat outmanned by the Harvesters, they still held the line as effectively as they could manage" several more members of the different Fire Teams were wounded, but the medics in their respective teams patched them up and kept them fighting as they needed to clear out any more remains of the Harvester forces before they could do some serious havoc on the ship.

-----

In the bridge

Buzam sighed as more and more communications from the still disorganized Dread Squadrons filled the bridge, along with the complaints and arguments of the pilots and the crew. She couldn't

help but feel frustrated and disappointed.

"It seems we've relied on Meia's leadership of the Dreads too much, and we're paying dearly for it. We neglected to train Jura properly on how to take Meia's place in the event something such as this would happen."

"It's not our fault entirely Buzam, you are right that we relied too much on Meia—but only because she would never let us train another to take her place, she always wanted to do things herself, never to rely on anyone—but herself."

Magno knew a great deal about Meia ever since she met the young woman and knew just why she suffered from both her claustrophobia and her actions and words towards the crew. And as she narrated Meia's life to her second in command, Meia herself saw the same images of her own life in her mind.

"Ever since the tragedy that took her past life away from her, the public that had once supported her and her parents now turned their back on her, ridiculing her and calling her trash—and worse—Meia realized that she had nothing left to call her own—and she had ever since been forced to fight for it—and in the end—she was all alone."

-----

In the Medical Bay—

In Meia's mind she began to recall her childhood, the days that she spent with her Fahma and Ohma, there were days of happiness, just as there were days of sadness when her parents would fight and argue, and the happiness was when they would give her a party and dot on her when she came home from school—her parents were scientists who tried their absolute best to revitalize a part of Megele that had grown barren and was no longer a viable place to live. That and the advancements that were promised for the people of Megele made them famous.

Her mind traveled to the time she saw her parents during their Christmas times together, and when her fahma gave her a present of a head-piece, the very same one she wore on her head. Her fahma commented on how beautiful Meia looked with the gift on her and that it was a gift from her ohma for her Christmas day, along with a small music box that she kept close to her. There were other happier times as well, but not everything was going well—somehow something went horribly wrong and the project failed several times and it made things even harder for them all—the problems piled up until the facility suffered an accident that forced everyone in the area to evacuate.

It was there that the day that haunted her for a very long time came to be—as she was among the people been evacuated, the pods that would take the people to safety were already being filled up rapidly by many desperate people. That was when only the daughters would be allowed on board, Meia however tried to reach out for her fahma, unwilling to be parted from her fahma at this point and time—however her mother told her that she was stronger than her and that it would be better for her to leave now—but she said no as she tried to reach out to her mother—however she only saw her mother

shake her head as the doors of the life pod closed and then she was surrounded by people and placed in total darknessâ€|this was where the fear took hold of her heart and mind ever since.

She sometimes disliked her fahma since she saw her as being weaker at times, and she hoped that someday she would be mature and strong enough to stand up and protect her fahmaâ€|but in the end, her fahma was the one who protected herâ€|not in the way she wanted.

She cried and that was when Paiway noted the tear and was stunned as this was the first time Meia ever cried.

"This isâ€|the first time I've ever seen Meia cry."

-----

Back out in the real world in the Registerâ€|

"All right, everyone rest and re-armâ€|wait for confirmation of contacts."

"Yes sir!"

The Spartan made his way into the Register, while placing his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle on his back with a thump of metal on metal as the magnetic pads held the weapon in place. His Fire Teams were able to hold off the Harvesters with little to no losses and were in the process of some quick patching up and re-supplying themselves with ammunition and supplies. So far, the women were doing a good job in containing the Harvesters when they spread about. And for now there was a lull in the Harvester attacks, allowing them to take breather while Cortana provided the support fire.

As he stepped inside he was greeted by Gascogne with a smile, the Spartan looked at the women under the head supplier's command and was happy that the women in the Register were able to keep their heads cool throughout the whole situation they were in. The main Dread teams were able to pull back and get back in their feet as the main force pilots were able to rest while their Dreads were being refueled, repaired, and re-supplied. The next band of Dread pilots, namely the reinforcement teams were holding the fort while the veterans were recovering and were back into the fight once Jura gave the order.

However the Spartan turned and could tell that the one who was supposed to lead them was far from ready to go back out into the fight as he spotted Jura huddling in a nearby corner. The blonde pilot was physically and mentally unready to lead the Dreads. After her disastrous first taste of commanding the Dreads and their formations, the blonde pilot went back into her own place and was afraid to come back out. Her head was on her knees and her long blonde hair covered her face.

"You all right?"

The blonde woman looked up and saw the Spartan kneeling down and looking at her. She gazed at the Spartan and his golden visor. She was even surprised that the Spartan was talking to her after she said very insulting things towards him of all people. She knew how deadly

a warrior he was and what he could do to a person if he wanted to.

"Heyâ€¦talk to me."

The Spartan said in a more authoritative tone in order to get the blonde Dread pilot to focus on him alone. Jura knew that she might as well say it before she broke down even more.

"Iâ€¦Iâ€¦I can't do this, I made a real mess out of everything. I don'tâ€¦.Iâ€¦I don't have what it takes to replace Meia."

"Don't be so full of yourself Jura."

Jura looked to see Gascogne looking at her as well. The head supplier can understand what Jura was going through, she knew for a fact that Jura had never taken a formal leadership position among the Dreads due to the fact that Meia never allowed it, the aqua-haired teen taking all the responsibility, however she knew that now was not the time to feel sorry for oneself just in the off chance something goes wrong in the first round.

"No one here expects you to lead the way Meia leads, nor is anyone blaming you for the mess out there, you were not ready but that does not mean you don't have what it takes to lead in the first place."

"Miss Gascogne is correctâ€¦everyone has their own way of dealing with things, you don't need to emulate anyone here, least of all Meia."

The Spartan then decided to talk about a fellow Spartan who he knew was at first the one who he and the others were uncomfortable with, but in the end proved to be a great leader and friend in his own right.

"I knew a fellow Spartan of my class named Kurt-051, he was the most open among usâ€¦always making friends and that normally is not our way since we wereâ€¦.private and always guarded even among ourselvesâ€¦so we didn't always trust him, but he was a great leader in his own right. He had one thing that separated him from the rest of us as wellâ€¦he had a sixth sense, and he could always tell if we were walking into an ambush, we learned to trust that instinct of his and his common sense. He helped us during another mission by himself and our worries about his overly friendly nature faded. And I can honestly say that in our exercise missions, he always managed to beat my squad with his ability to sense ambushes."

"The fact of the matter isâ€¦everyone is able to lead in their own fashion and you have your own way of leading the Dreads, you don't need to follow Meia's ways since you have your own methods and the others will follow through. When I took this position as leader of the Fire Teams, I lead them in the ways I know best, apart from what I've learned in my military days, lead the way you know and believe is bestâ€¦the rest will fall into place from there."

It was then that Cortana announced over the PA system once more the arrival of the Harvester Boarding Craft.

"Alert! All security personnel and Fire Teams get ready to engage the

Harvesters, external sensors show boarding craft moving towards the Nirvana's lower hull. Stand by and prepare to intercept and repel boarders!"

The Spartan got up once more and took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, and deactivated the safety lock, and as he was about to leave, he turned and looked at Jura who stared back at him.

"Rememberâ€¦|lead in your own wayâ€¦|do your best no matter the outcome, and the rest will fall into place."

As the Spartan left, Gascogne smirked at the sight of the seven foot tall green and black armored giant of a man leave the room to fight with the Harvesters once more.

"For a man, he certainly gives out good advice."

Jura nodded as she began to think about the words the Spartan told her.

-----

Meanwhileâ€¦|

The VanDread was currently being recharged as Hibiki and Dita were in the combined machine, the male teen growled a bit as the Harvesters continued their assault on the Nirvana under the leadership of the alien fighter and it was becoming even more annoying and troubling for the teen and the other pirates.

"That alien fighter is really pissing me offâ€¦|"

"Iâ€¦|I wonder if Meia is going to die?"

Hibiki listened to Dita and looked back a bit, surprised that the normally cheerful and bubbly redhead would be so downcast and sad, though he could understand why she was acting that way right now. However he didn't know what to say yet that could make her be the same as before. Despite her being a pain at times, he did like it when she came around and gave him food and she seemed okay once he got to hang around with her, though the whole thing of her being always glomping onto him, and calling him Mr. Alien was very annoying at times.

"It'sâ€¦|it's justâ€¦|something like that happening andâ€¦|"

"There's something my Grandfather used to tell me."

Dita stopped her sadness as she listened to what Hibiki has to say.

"You can complain, worry, and gripe about things all you want, but that doesn't mean that you always get an answer to those complaints. The most important thing s that when it's all said and done, you managed to get through it all somehow, and will you be the person you wanted to be?"

Dita turned and looked at Hibiki and Hibiki gave a smile to the redhead.



"I know that you're worried about Meia, but she's not going to be lost, Duero's there to take care of her, and so is Paiway. All we have to worry about is to protect the ship the way the Master Chief is doing so we can also protect the Medical Bay so that she will be in good hands, don't you think?"

Dita smiled and sniffled a bit and replied as she wiped the traces of tears from her eyes.

"You're rightâ€¦thanks Mr. Alien?"

Hibiki suddenly felt some strange sensations running through her and he blushed a bit and looked away, not understanding the emotions that Dita's smile and looks invoked in him. And naturally he decided to cover it up in something of an excuse.

"Wellâ€¦she'd say the same thing if she was here, and stop calling me Mr. Alien already."

It was then that a communicat  filled the VanDread and it was in Jura's voice.

"Attention all Dread pilots, being changing the energy wave frequency of you're beams and barrier shields, this way there will be a reduced chance of return fire."

Hibiki thought about that and was happy at least that they might have a chance not vaporizing each other in this fire-fight, but that still didn't mean that everything was in good straits, unless that alien fighter was taken out, the Harvesters would not stop their attacks. But they couldn't very well go back in there to take that thing out as it would just use the asteroids to escape and counter attack.

(There's got to be a way to take out that blasted fighterâ€¦but whatâ€¦we certainly can't just dive into this morass and hope to catch the thing.)

Hibiki thought over the situation and recalled his mentor telling him to always take the initiative and he did on the desert world and it freed the Vanguard and defeated the Harvesters' little trap and got them out of that mess. He then recalled another lesson about using the environment to take out the enemyâ€¦the Master Chief told him how it was done before many times over. He then took the time to study the battle fieldâ€¦and what they had with them already and what they could use it for in this situation.

Hibiki then began to form a plan in mind and when he recalled not just the already existing weapons on the Nirvanaâ€¦but Jura's own announcement on the comm-network, he felt that everything in his plan was already falling into place. It was risky to the extremeâ€¦if he got this wrong, they were really going to be in some serious troubleâ€¦but if they did it rightâ€¦well, there was only one way to find out.

-----

In the temporary meeting area of the Fire Teamsâ€¦

As soon as the Spartan arrived in the scene, the women in the Fire Teams and the NCOs saluted their supreme commander as he was being told by Cortana over the COM what they were expecting. Cortana had been able to take out a large number of the newly arriving boarding craft, but since there were too many asteroids in the area, it was not going to be easy for her to take all of the alien fighters out and the boarding craft at the very same time.

However, that certainly didn't mean that all of the Harvesters were getting through as several more boarding craft were shredded by the Point Defense Guns and when the survivors thought they were in the clear, Cortana then guided the Fire Teams and John right at the aft section near the lower hull as several contacts of boarding craft were heading right for them. They were not going to be ready as the Spartan began to issue orders for ambush teams to get ready and surprise their foes. The Spartan moved in as they were about to be boarded once more, he readied his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and that is the signals for the Fire teams as they too got ready to engage the boarding craft and the occupants inside them.

The fighting began in earnest as several of the Harvester Shock Troopers managed to force their way into the ship and spread into the hull. The Spartan told the women through the COM systems in their helmets to wait, and when the time was right the Nirvana Fire teams once more unleashed hell as the Spartan gave the order.

-----

Back in the Medical Bay

Duero had managed to patch up most of Meia's injuries, but that was not the real problem that the Tarak doctor was dealing with right now. The Megele woman had suffered a lot of injuries that he had been able to treat, while Paiway told him that this was the only time she had ever seen Meia cry, meaning that she must be having mental trauma and that in itself was troubling. Mental injuries were of a totally different nature and were far more delicate than physical injuries since if they were not treated soon, despite the person being in good physical health they would be scarred for life.

To further add to the danger was Paeksis fragment that was found in Meia's Cat-scan that had somehow entered her wound and was causing damage to the central nervous system, the crystal seemed to be creating it's own signals in the brain and it worried that maybe Meia would suffer greatly from this unless the crystal was removed from her mind soon or else she would suffer from the confusion in her inner mind.

Meia however was far from concerned with the situation, as she thought back on what her life had become after the incident that destroyed her world. The incident that destroyed her family's company made her an outcast in the eyes of the public of Megele. She had to struggle to survive and fight, she joined several street gangs, and fought her best to live, doing all the vices. She recalled all the voices that backstabbed her from behind, calling her nothing but scum and trash. She had been famous once, the daughter of two well respected scientists, and now she was nothing. She saw the dark side of her world and all of the things that truly made it ugly in time, the only goal the aqua-haired girl had in her life was to end it.

It was then that she met Magno and Magno gave her the means to decide for herself how she would meet that end and on her own terms.

However as she thought back on all the times she wanted to say sorry to her fahma, she realized how weak she was as well as there was no way for her to say her apology.

It was then that Duero saw Meia's mental signals reaching critical levels and he shouted at Meia, hoping that despite the oddness of the action, Meia could at least hear his words to her before she totally gave up on her will to live.

"Meia! Don't you give up here and now!"

Meia howeverâ€|

(Iâ€|Iâ€|I can't take this anymoreâ€|.)

-----

The Harvesters made one more lethal counter-strike as they gathered momentum and the alien fighter once more unleashed a deadly beam strike that punched through the shields and smashed into the port arm of the ship, causing an explosion.

"Port arm has been hit! The ship is starting to tilt!"

"I'm closing off the section nowâ€|all key personnel in the area are advised to evacuate immediately!"

Cortana, Belvedere, Amarone and the rest of the bridge crew were giving off reports increasing damage to the Nirvana, along with loss of power to several decks on the ship, the drop in the shield strength, and the inability of the Dreads to still take out the Harvester fighter. Thankfully none of the crewâ€|including the Nirvana Fire Teams were in the Port Arm of the Nirvana when it was hitâ€|though Bart shouted once more in pain as the shot really hurt him.

Buzam was getting more and more stressed out by all that was happening until they both got a communicuÃ© from Hibiki.

"There's no need to get all worked up on this."

They all turned and looked at Hibiki who had somewhat a cheeky grin on his face.

"I've got a plan I'm willing to try out that just might get us out of this mess, that is, if you're willing to listen."

Magno looked at Hibiki and wondered just what the young teen had in mind this time. She decided to see just what he had in mind to get them all out of this mess they were in at this point

"Oh yeah, this plan of yours won't happen to be a suicide mission?"

"Hah! This is hardly a suicide mission, but it might qualify as one

if I got the planning all wrong, besidesâ€|dying for women is not on my mind in the leastâ€|however, we don't exactly have much in terms of options now do we? Besidesâ€|I'm not planning to die until I find out just what sort of stuff you all have in the galley menu anyway ."

Magno knew the truth in those words and decided to go ahead with the plan.

"All right then young oneâ€|how about this for incentiveâ€|if this plan of yours works and you're still alive, then you can eat all you want in the galley until you can't even leave the chair."

Hibiki smiled at the challenge.

"Now that is the way I'd like to go downâ€|but before we get down to the brass tacks of all this, I need to talk with Cortana and I need you're permission for one more thing before we get down to having the greatest fire-works display in history."

"And you need my permission to do what?"

"To have the Dreads move at my signal and have them reconfigure their shields to these specifications."

Buzam looked at Magno and silently asked the elderly Captain was really going to agree with whatever the young Tarak lad had in mind, but the elderly Captain nodded and gave her agreement, it wasn't as if they had much in terms of choices.

"You have my permission."

"Thanksâ€|now I need to talk to Cortana."

The woman in her AI form looked at Hibiki and crossed her hands with a slight smile. She was liking this kid due to his growing demeanor and attitude and she could see and tell that he had something grand in mind, she didn't know if it might work since she hadn't gotten the specifics of what he had in mind, but she was willing to listen.

"Go ahead Hibiki, what do you have in mind?"

Magno then thought about the time that she met meia and watched her change from being a street thug with no future and no hope into one of the best Dread pilots she knew and she treated meia as a daughterâ€|she was not in the mood to learn that meia died nowâ€|there was so much left to do. She only hoped that whatever solution Duero had made to save Meia's life was enough, and she hoped that Meia was not going to give up just now.

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|

Duero knew that what he was attempting was short of insanely dangerous, but right now, he was running out of alternatives to save Meia's life. Brain surgery was out of the question due to not just the risk of further injuring Meia and causing even worse damage, but the fighting was getting even more serious out there and time was running out. He had Parfet rig up a special device known as a high

frequency sonic-wave psychic-stimulator. This device was pretty much not used normally though it was designed for medical procedures, the theory was that the device could create a wave of psychic waves in a sonic frequency that could in theory shatter the Paeksis fragment and bring Meia back from her comatose stateâ€|however the risks if it failed were dire. If it failedâ€|even if Meia livedâ€|she would never be the same person she was beforeâ€|ever again.

But seeing as their options were running dry on himâ€|he had no choiceâ€|

-----

Out in spaceâ€|

The Nirvana was now back on it's feet as Cortana continued to fire the 50mm Point Defense Guns to cut down the incoming numbers of Boarding Craft. But it seemed that the Harvester had just decided to wipe out the Nirvana entirely as the Boarding Craft were no longer on the scope. Cortana then got the Nirvana's UNSC arsenals ready for Hibiki's signalâ€|when the Tarak teen told her about the plan he had in mind, the only thing that came to her mind was gutsy, insane and quite riskyâ€|but gutsy all the same. Even the Master Chief had to admit that the plan was very dangerous and could very well go the wrong way when he heard about itâ€|but he knew that they were out of options, so the only advice he gave his student was get it done and make it out alive.

Hibiki checked all the needed calculations and checked the Dreadsâ€|namely their shields and the frequenciesâ€|finding them all to be right on the dotâ€|he knew that it was time to play the game as he contacted the Dread teams and their leaders.

"All right! This is show time so get into formation! There's one massive eat all you can buffet with my name written all over it so let's get this mission done and pound these Harvesters right back into whatever ugly and disgusting junk-yard that spawned them!"

The Dreads formed up behind VanDread Dita as the entire harvester force gathered up and were now about make a mass charge. The Tarak teen nodded as he tracked their movements and made sure that he doubled checked his plans before making this move of his possible.

"All Dreads report in."

There was a long bit of silence until the Dread team leaders began to call out their readiness, despite the fact that they spoke in VERY strained voices and were not very happy with the fact that they were now under the command of a man from Tarak.

"A-Team ready."

"B-Team ready."

"C-Team ready."

"D-Team ready."

Hibiki nodded as he knew that the women didn't like taking orders

from him, but he put that out of his mind as he had a mission to accomplish and a job to do. He was not going to miss this one chance to not only end the Harvesters in this battle permanently, but to finally eat until he either died or couldn't fill his stomach anymore. He watched the Harvesters mounted a full scale charge and began the count-down.

"Tenâ€| "

A massive barrage of beam fire and solid weapons came right at the Nirvana and smashed hard on the already straining shields, further adding to the great strain and the danger of the shields collapsing. However Hibiki knew that this was the only chance they had at this point and continued the countdown.

"â€|nineâ€|eightâ€|sevenâ€| "

The shields were now offline and the Nirvana was now vulnerable to attackâ€|and the Harvesters intensified their offensive, just as Hibiki hoped them to do as their forces closed in. Bart naturally shouted in great pain as the blasts hit him everywhere and he shouted to Hibiki.

"Hurry up already! I can't take much more of this and neither can the ship!"

"â€|sixâ€|fiveâ€|fourâ€| "

The Harvesters maintained their offensive and were now dedicating their full force to the attack, just as the Tarak teen hoped they would, he sent a covert signal to Cortana and the woman in charge of the UNSC weapon systems on the Nirvana replied that she was ready.

"â€|threeâ€|twoâ€|oneâ€|LET'S GO!!!!"

VanDread Dita launched forward and the Dreads were right behind it as the VanDread led the Nirvana crew's deadly and extremely risky counter-attack.

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|

Meia screamed out in pain as the device was activated and her body thrashed in spasms and convulsionsâ€|making everyone in the Medical Bay tense and very anxiousâ€|a minute of thrashing laterâ€|Meia's now still form landed back on the bed and the monitors that scanned her vital signs had just flat-linedâ€|a very dangerous sign indeed as the women in the Medical bay were stunned.

"MEIA!!!!"

-----

Back in spaceâ€|

"I CAN'T TAKE ANYMORE OF THIS!!!!"

Dita shouted out as the massive beam bolts from the harvester hit the VanDread and tested even it's armor to the limit as they were hit fast and hard.

Hibiki however reassured his co-pilot with a hand on her own and silently told her to place her trust in him and his plans as he looked at the monitors. The Dreads were already reaching their designated coordinates and the Nirvana's main weapons were primed and ready to fire. And the time to attack wasâ€|now!!!

"LET'S DO THIS!!!!"

As soon as he was in position himself the Tarak teen released the shoulder cannons, but instead of firing at their normal shoulder position, they moved downwards to the forearms and melded with the forearm blades and were now like swords on the arms. Hibiki shouted out as he charged up the energy on the cannons and then the VanDread spread out the arms and then at that momentâ€|

Hibiki unleashed a massive spray of beam fire from the sword-arms and the beams moved right to where the Dreads were. The beams impacted on the Dreads' shields and were sent right into the asteroid field, creating a massive tunnel of energy that surrounded the entire enemy force and smashed right into the asteroids as well. The Nirvana under Cortana's command unleashed a hailstorm of Archer Missiles right into the fray, the missiles avoided the Dreads and the VanDread and smashed into the asteroids along with the beams, and while some were destroyed by the beam fireâ€|it further added to the massive amounts of destruction in the battle-zone.

The results were devastating to the Harvesters as the beams streaked everywhere at once and the Seed Ships, Cube Fighters, and remaining Boarding Craft were cut down by the beams and the missiles from the Nirvana, along with the massive numbers of destroyed asteroid fragments that streamed all over the placeâ€|if they were not blown to shreds by the beams, they were torn apart by the missiles, the missile explosions and the asteroids as well. Even their high speed fighter was unable to escape the destruction as while it was designed for speed and evasion, there was no way it could escape this much firepower in all sides at once as it was shredded and then blown into nothing but debrisâ€|as the fighter was destroyed, the rest of the Harvester strike force was completely obliteratedâ€|resulting in one massive victory for the Nirvana pirates.

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

"What an insane idea! Using our Dreads' shields to reflect his shots right into the enemy!"

Buzam said as she watched the destruction unfold and the results became obvious as the bridge crew reported that all Harvester contacts were being lost one by one.

"Insane? Yes, but gutsy tooâ€|and it did work."

Cortana said with a smile as she saw the since the Dread teams were all alive and so was Hibiki and Dita in the VanDread, it showed that Hibiki's planned gamble had paid off big time.

"I have to agreeâ€¦it might have been a man's insane idea, but it worked perfectly. I guess the galley had better get ready, from what I can tellâ€¦we're about to have a heck of a celebration after all this."

Magno said with a smileâ€¦impressed by the plan Hibiki came up with and managed to pull off successfully.

The Fire Teams watched the fire-works from a view screen and the Spartan was looking at what his student had just been able to pull off.

(Not bad Hibikiâ€¦not bad at all.)

-----

Meia looked on and found herself in a peaceful place, filled with green grass and a clear blue sky with cloudsâ€¦she felt no pain, no fearâ€¦nothing, but blissful peace and calmnessâ€¦it was good, she could very well stay here foreverâ€¦however she saw her mother and heard her voice once more.

"You shouldn't give up now Meiaâ€¦you're not weak, you never were weak. I was the weaker one."

Meia stood up and saw her motherâ€¦alive in her mind and she couldn't help but feel shocked and yet filled with relief and happiness, but she wanted to be sure that her fahma was not going to once more disappear like before.

"Mother?"

"I never had the courage to step out of the shadows like you and you're ohma did, the only thing I ever wanted to do was to create a safe haven for you. One place where you can feel peaceful and secure when you came home at least, it didn't matter to me whether you were happy or sad, full of energy and life, or exhausted from you're days growing up. A place where I could always greet you with a happy 'Welcome Home!' no matter what kind of day it was that you have."

"No mother! Youâ€¦you were never the weak one! It was meâ€¦I was the weak oneâ€¦I never had the courage to understand others, I was afraid of showing how I felt, becauseâ€¦I was afraid of being hurt again and not being liked."

"Meia, you are a woman with a very strong will and a gentle heart. So please, don't blame yourself anymoreâ€¦you have nothing to be afraid of now. Open your heart to others Meia, no person can live aloneâ€¦and please live, for there are those who would be very sad if you die now."

Meia then saw the people she met appear in the fieldâ€¦Jura, Dita, Barnette, Gascogne, Magno, Paiway, Parfetâ€¦and the others she worked with. They were then followed by the men, she saw Bart with his whiney expression, she saw Duero as he gave her advice on how to pilot and Vanguard and how she ignored the advice and nearly lost her life. She saw Hibiki in all of his times being a Vanguard pilot, how they clashed with one another and how they would square off. Then she



saw the Spartan, Master Chief Petty Officer John-117.

She recalled how serious and aloof the Spartan was, how dedicated he was to doing what had to be done in order to get the mission completed, she recalled the times she would see him in his combat stance and how much awe she sometimes felt when he would fight, and how powerful he was with all of his abilities. But she noted, though she never admitted it, that he carried great pains and burdens being who and what he was. She saw glimpses of humanity in him despite his emotionless tone and nature at timesâ€| namely when he saved her life on that desert world and how he would be watching out for his Fire Teams, making sure to be there when they needed his help. She then recalled the words he said to her before.

"I want you to know that if you are in grave dangerâ€|I will rescue youâ€|even if I am the only one to do it."

She looked at her mother who smiled back at her and she began to see her fade away, she didn't want to lose her mother nowâ€|not after seeing her alive once moreâ€|even if it was possibly only an illusion.

"Mother! Please don't go! I have so many things to tell you!"

"I know my dearâ€|I will not disappear as long as you keep me in you're heart and liveâ€|please Meiaâ€|live."

-----

In the Medical Bayâ€|

Meia opened her eyes and nearly closed them when she saw the bright lights before herâ€|but she didn't have to wait very long as Parfet and Paiway appeared with tears in their eyes as they were relieved to see her alive and safe once more.

"Meia! You're all right!"

"We saved you!"

Meia couldn't help but smile at the two and replied.

"Please stop that you two, you're making a lot of noise."

She reached for her face and was a bit panicking as she realized that her head piece was gone and she gasped, hoping that it was not destroyed in the battle beforehand.

"Don't worry, it's right here."

The aqua-haired pilot looked to see Duero holding the head piece in hand, cleaned and ready for her to take back. Duero noted that Meia treated it as her most prized possession and he kept it safe and whole the time it had fallen off her face.

"This must be very important for you."

"Noâ€|at least not reallyâ€|it's a lesson to me."

-----  
Laterâ€¦|

As the Nirvana moved on and out of the asteroid field, the ship was quiet, and the only one who was busy on the bridge was none other than Buzam. The commander sighed a bit as she looked over the scanners of ship and looked out into space.

In the Bio-Park was Ezra, sitting on a bench, rubbing her growing belly and smiling at the fact that they were all safe and she would have a chance to have her baby daughter born soon as she looked up into the stars before her in the viewing dome.

In the Medical Bay, Paiway was currently asleep after drawing a picture of Meia alive and the Navi-robot was busy downloading information and resting, while Duero was still busy with his remaining workload in the Medical Bay including the wounded members of the Fire Teams.

In the Engineering Bay, Parfet once more was in despair as Gascogne beat her once more in cards and she wondered why she even agreed to it, much to the amusement of the Head Supplier who calmed Parfet down as they played once more.

Meia couldn't find it in herself to sleep as she was wearing her sleeping wear which amazingly as it was, in pink as she looked at the stars and the picture in her hands and her head piece there once more on her head and face. She looked at her music box and the sample that her fahma had on hand years before.

She then got dressed into her flight suit and made her way to the galley to find all the other members of the crew relaxing after the battle. The place had bottles and dishes all over the place as the pilots of the Dreads had celebrated their victory over the Harvesters, along with the Nirvana Fire Teams. Jura and Barnette were leaning on a wall and were fast asleep side by side. And Dita was sleeping as well, with Hibiki nearby and snoring, bare of his Marine Armor and his tunic. On his table were the highest stack of plates as well, with one bottle acting as his pillow. The rest of the crew were also asleep as well. She normally was not happy with this mess and breach of discipline and protocol, but allowed it for today, they won a battle without her assistance. She looked at Hibiki and wondered what to do now.

"They all did their absolute best out thereâ€¦|and in here too."

Meia turned and saw Magno walk towards her.

"Oh, it's you Captain."

Magno smiled and then directed her attention on the young teen who was still snoring away, with his stomach full to the brim. She then took Hibiki's tunic and used it to cover the young teen to keep him from getting cold at night.

"It's very ironic Meiaâ€¦|he's you're exact opposite of you, the passionate fool. But he's won our hearts and right under our own noses at that. You and this young rascal are so much alike in ways, the only difference between you and him is the fact that he expresses

his emotions."

Meia nodded just a bit at the truth in Magno's words.

"Captainâ€¦Iâ€¦"

Magno smiled gently at Meia and replied back.

"Meia, don't you think that now is the time to find some forgiveness, for yourself?"

Meia thought about it and wondered what she should do nowâ€¦it was then that she recalled that there was someone she wanted to talk toâ€¦and she knew just where to find him.

-----

In the UNSC section of the Nirvanaâ€¦

John-117 was currently cleaning his weapons, while he was bare of his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor and was only in a black tank-top and grey military pants and boots, he had already allowed the Fire teams to take a long deserved break and he had stayed on the section and ate his MREs and went back to work in getting the new combat data stored in for the next day's debriefing. He was rather busy with his work that he didn't notice Cortana coming in, until she was only a few steps behind him. He quickly turned and Cortana smiled in greeting to her protector and friend.

"Aren't you going to go to sleep?"

"Never did get much sleep in those daysâ€¦what about you?"

"Not really, the feast was great don't you think so?"

"I guess."

John-117 placed aside his M7 Caseless SMG and walked over to the nearby screen that showed outer space as Cortana walked beside him, her frame reaching the Spartan's height while lacking the muscle structure of the Spartan. The two of them gazed out into space and both of them silently contemplated what they were going to do afterwards once all this was overâ€¦Cortana however was the first to vocalize that thought.

"Johnâ€¦what do you plan to do once we make it back to the system were Tarak and Megele are located?"

"Honestlyâ€¦I don't know. I doubt I'd be able to fit in either worldâ€¦and I guess the same goes for you."

Cortana nodded at that, she was a woman like the rest of the Megele crewâ€¦but she didn't think in the same way they did about men, she had no doubt that she would be considered as insane or worse by the people thereâ€¦and she doubted that the Chief would fit in with Tarak either. All of these facts made her question what the two of them were indeed going to do once they were able to help the women and men reach their home system.

They certainly couldn't go to Earth since the UNSC never existed here and the Covenant hardly existed either as there had been little to no encounters with anything alien that resembled the Covenant races. This was where they both were lost, she was still unsure about her own path, but she worried more about John. He was a warrior, a soldier, and the absence of war would mean that he was no longer needed. Granted the Harvesters were a new threat for him to deal with, but what would he do after all that was over, she thought about it and decided to put those thoughts aside for now. They had all the time in the universe figure out just where they belonged in this new one that they were brought into.

"John?"

"Yes?"

"No matter what happens, I'm glad we're still side by side, so maybe someday we'll find our place in this universe together."

"Maybe, "

"We will, and I want you to be right there with me, no matter what happens."

John turned and looked Cortana squarely and replied to her with all of his strength.

"I'll be right there with you, I won't let you go, you have my promise on that."

"Thank you John, I'll see you tomorrow."

With that, Cortana turned around and held John's hand tightly, though her grip was not in the same caliber as the Spartan's own grip she was strong as well. John didn't know what to do but reply back with a strong grip of his own, a very gentle and strong grip. With that Cortana moved away and bid him good night as he turned back to the screen and continued to stare into space.

It was then that he noted that there was someone coming towards him, he turned and spotted Meia Gisborn in her full uniform walking towards him, the Spartan could tell that she had something to say to him and from the looks of things, it seemed important. With that in mind, the Spartan turned about and faced Meia.

"Meia Gisborn? What are you doing out of your quarters? Shouldn't you be resting?"

"I'm fine, do you have anything left over to do Master Chief?"

"Nothing really, the Fire Teams are taking a break after all the fighting and I've got nothing important to deal with, why do you ask?"

"I want to talk to about something."

"I'm listening."

"Iâ€|well I want to apologizeâ€|"

"For what?"

"For not listening to your advice beforeâ€|on that mission on the desert world a few months ago before all this happened. I shouldn't have gone down there and made the situation even worse. And I said some insulting things towards you that you didn't deserve to hear."

"No need to apologize to me."

"I do! I meanâ€|I want to set the record straight. You are an amazing soldier and leader, and I want you to know that. I saw the recordsâ€|of that mission you had down there on the planet weeks before. And I doubt I could have been able to lead the others the way you did under such conditions...and the enemies you all faced below on that planet. I want toâ€|say thank youâ€|for being part of this crew, and all you've done."

"You don't need to thank a soldier for doing what is required of him Meiaâ€|but you're welcome anyway."

Meia nodded and it was then that she decided to ask him somethingâ€|she knew that her actions were going to breach the personal life of the Spartan and she knew that he was a very private person at times as he only gave out advice when needed, in a way, he was like her in that regardâ€|but the Captain told her to open up to others and get strength from them, and while she didn't know if her efforts with the Spartan would actually workâ€|she was willing to give it a try.

"Can you tell me about yourself Master Chief?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Didâ€|did you have any memories about you're life as a child before you were taken into the Spartan II Program?"

The Spartan thought it over and he did recall one thing he loved as a child before he was taken away and sent to train in the planet of Reach all those years ago.

"I did recall having a favorite game when I was young."

"What was it?"

"Gravball."

"Can youâ€|show me how it's done?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Call it aâ€|chance to know you since we are part of the same crew."

John thought it over and decided, that this was not a harmful thing and nodded.

"All right then. But don't blame me if I winâ€|I remember being

pretty good in this game when I was younger."

Meia could tell that the Spartan spoke the truth, and for a momentâ€¦just a moment, a childish flicker of joy and enthusiasm showed itself in the Spartan's eyes as he spoke about his childhood past time and began to show her how it was playedâ€¦this made Meia even more curious on just who Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 was before he ever became a Spartan. What was he like as a child before he was conscripted into the military to be the warrior he was now.

It seems she had a lot to learn from and about the Spartan after all.

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

-----

How is that so far, at least the young kid Hibiki is given some good screen time from time to time and while it might not differentiate from the series, there were certainly some changes as he was also able to coordinate not just the Dreads, but also the weapons of the Nirvana in conjunction with Cortana.

And while the Master Chief's role isn't as pronounced as in the other chapters, that hardly means that it will be the same in the other chapters. There will be key areas where the Spartan takes center stage soon enough, so expect things in those chapters to get real hairy.

There are at least two classes of Harvester Infantry so farâ€¦the basic Harvester Trooper that is designed for planetary engagement. And the Harvester Shock Trooper which is built in the same fashion as the Trooper, but is designed for infiltration of ships and attacking the crew of the ship. The Harvester Troopers will evolve and as you might have read in the previous chapter there will be variants of the Harvester Troopers that are designed for specific combat roles in each following chapter. So you can bet that you won't see the same foes twice.

And it seems that Meia has taken a first few steps to learn about how to get to know others and to live with them as wellâ€¦and it seems that she knows something about the Spartan that even Cortana didn't know about. Is there a chance Cortana will have competition for John?

We'll just have to wait and see now won't we?

I might include other females from the crew who might begin to take an interest on the Spartan, but don't hold you're breath just yet. Cortana still has the lead if there was such a competition for the heart of the Spartan.

On the next chapter, we'll take a more mature shot at Hibiki and Dita's relationship and the Spartan and Cortana now find themselves in a situation that does not involve combatâ€¦relationships. How will they handle that?

Here's a little trailer for you readers:

-----

Hibiki didn't know what to do right now as he faced Dita while they were in the Bio-Park—he had hoped that he could at least try and make sense of his state and why he was so confused on what to do with his current situation with the redhead—but he certainly was not expecting this all of a sudden. And why was he suddenly having this feeling of wanting to get closer to the redhead?

Dita felt her mind wander in circles as she was now face to face with Hibiki and wondered what she should say to her Mr. Alien. She wanted to make things right, but for some reason she found herself wanting to get closer to Hibiki. Why was she feeling this way towards her Mr. Alien?

The two didn't know why they were acting this way as they inched closer and closer together—until they were merely millimeters apart from each other and—

-----

See you on Chapter 9 Miscommunications—

## 10. Chapter 10

VanDread —" Halo

Disclaimer: VanDread belongs to Gonzo, Halo belongs to Bungie—I own neither, so all lawyers looking to make a buck off of me, please leave.

### Chapter 9

#### Miscommunications

( ): Thoughts

-----

The Nirvana was currently cruising along the vast expanse of space, and so far, there had been no battles for the past few days and for the first time, the vast portion of the Nirvana crew were taking it easy for a change.

-----

In Dita's room—

Dita's room was filled with a lot of alien memorabilia, a testament to her desire to meet actual aliens and to get to know them more. The redhead was currently sitting on her bed and working on what appeared to be a pink pillow with a cute blue alien with tentacles on it—while Paiway, who was Dita's closest friend ever since joining the pirates watched her with her work on the pillow.

"Ow! That hurts!"

Dita complained as she was accidentally pricked by the needle that she was using to sew in the blue alien design on the pillow.

Paiway wondered just what her friend was doing and she then decided to ask her friend just who she was going to give her latest creation to.

"Hey Dita—are you giving that to a guy?"

Dita looked a bit surprised and smiled while blushing slightly at the thought of Hibiki.

Paiway smiled and spoke out to her best friend since she happened to find the pillow to be nice and it would be nice to have it as well.

"Because I was thinking you could give it me!"

Dita however shook her head and pulled the pillow away and hugged it tightly while speaking to her best friend cheerfully.

"No way! I'm sorry Paiway, but this pillow is meant for Mr. Alien!"

Paiway gave a sad and slightly disgusted look and used her frog puppet to voice just that.

"Barf! Kero!"

-----

In the bridge—

"I'm not kidding, it was really this big!"

Belvedere said with great humor and enthusiasm as she was telling her friend Amarone about a special story that she knew about back on Megele.

"Wow! So what happened next?"

"Well—it's kind of hard to explain."

In the meantime, Ezra was busy trying not to fall asleep, but she was not getting much in terms of effects on her efforts as she was still falling asleep. The fact that she was pregnant with a very healthy baby attributed to her current condition of falling asleep, since if she was not eating strange types of food to feed her daughter and satisfy her cravings, she was resting as if she was dead to the world.

Cortana was currently in the UNSC section, working with the Spartan on several matters and since they were not currently under attack and she had no prior commitments to the Register for the moment.

Buzam looked at the bridge crew and sighed as she stood next to the Captain.

"It seems that if we're not under attack, things get rather dull around here, maybe we should do some practice drills for the



crew."

Magno looked at her commander with some amusement.

"I wasn't aware that you were into all that military ballyhoo BC."

The silver haired and tanned woman looked at her captain and replied to the insinuation, which was close to the truth in some ways.

"I'm only concerned with the safety of the crew Captainâ€¦if the Harvesters caught us like thisâ€¦we're going to be in very serious trouble."

"Our business is piracy, am I right?"

"I know thatâ€¦but stillâ€¦"

The elderly woman could understand Buzam's unease and boredom, the crew however deserved a break after all the things that had been happening to them for quite a bit. But if her commander was getting boredâ€¦then perhaps there was one place she might get to relieve the boredom.

"If you feel like watching something to relieve the boredom BC, why don't you pay the UNSC section a visit, I hear the Master Chief is coming up with a few new exercises for the Fire Teams that might make things interesting."

"Interesting?"

-----

In the Hanger Bayâ€¦

While the bridge crew were gossiping, the happy go lucky young redhead made her way to the Hanger Bay where Hibiki's Vanguard and the Paeksis enhanced Dreads were being stored, she wanted to show her latest creation to her Mr. Alien, she knew that he was going to love it. However, she was surprised to find that Hibiki was not in the Hanger Bay working on his Vanguard as he normally did on times when he was not training with Mr. Green Alien.

"Mr. Alien? Are you here?"

Dita looked into the open cockpit of the Vanguard and was surprised not to find him there, she then moved away and stood up as she looked about a lot more than before, hoping that there were signs as to where Hibiki had gone off too.

"That's really strangeâ€¦I thought that he was going to be hereâ€¦maybe he's with Mr. Doctorâ€¦"

As Dita left the Hangerâ€¦she had no idea how close she actually was to finding Hibikiâ€¦as said teen was busy holding himself up in the space above the cockpit of his Vanguard, the moment he heard Dita's shouting and her running to the Hanger Bay, he quickly hid there as he was not right now in the mood for Dita' glomping onto him and doing Gods only knew what to him.

As soon as he was sure that the redhead was not around he groaned and spoke.

"Darn it! What does she want from me this time?! AUGH!"

Hibiki's shout was natural as his grip slipped and he fell on the seat of his Vanguard hard. As soon as he peeked outside of the cockpit and looked closely to make sure that the redhead was gone, he got out and decided to go to his quarters in the UNSC section of the shipâ€|maybe the crazy alien loving woman would leave him alone for now there.

It wasn't that he disliked Dita completely, his appreciation for her cooking was very strong and for some reason, he felt a bit more comfortable if she was around, however he was getting tired of a good deal of her usual antics. He moved out as he heard that the Spartan was busy giving the women a brand new form of training and he was very curious as to what sort of training the Spartan had in mind this time.

-----

In the UNSC section of the Nirvanaâ€|

Fire Team Bravo was moving through a massive maze of walks and corridors, they were currently armed with M90A Shotguns, BR55 HB SR Battle Rifles, and M7 Caseless Sub Machine Guns with stocks extended as they moved through the maze that was set up in the larger section of the UNSC part of the pirate ship. Hilda adjusted the sights on her Battle Rifle as she checked the corner near the maze and as soon as she saw the area to be clear of possible traps, she gave the all clear hand sign signal and moved in with the rest of her Fire Team.

As they made their way to the large chamber, the NCO and two of her comrades moved first and looked at the door before them. Hilda then called in one of her comrades and as soon as she arrived, Hilda told her to get her M90A Shotgun and the whole Fire Team got ready as the shotgun wielding member fired a charge at the door, shredding the metal lock as the Fire Team quickly entered the chamber, rapidly moving and securing the positionâ€|however they got a nasty surpriseâ€|

The target was not in the room, but they all got greeted by Sonic Grenades that stunned the women along with several smoke grenades. The team was in panic and they quickly tried to recover from the sudden shock.

A few moments laterâ€|as the smoke and sound died down, they turned and found themselves being stared at by their Commanding Officer, John-117.

The Spartan shook his head and gave the women the results of the exercise.

"Congratulationsâ€|you walked right into a trap."

The seven women Fire team groaned out in disappointment as they placed aside their weapons, as Hilda took off her helmet and shook out her short black hair and looked at her commanding

officer.

"Permission to speak Chief?"

"Go ahead."

"The target was here the last time we did thisâ€|begging pardon sir, but why was it not here?"

The Spartan shook his head as he guided the women out of the maze and back where the other Fire Teams were also watching the video feed from the maze. Buzam had arrived earlier and had been looking at the video feed as the other Fire Teams were. She wondered just how the Spartan was going to reply to that.

The Spartan then guided the women to be seated and he began to lecture the crew on what they had witnessed.

"This exercise is not about memorization, this is about adaptation. You cannot expect the enemy to leave the same target in the same location like last time. Just as you all have recalled in that asteroid battle, the Harvesters were able to use the asteroid field to their advantage. You're enemies, the Harvesters are not stupid, Parfet's analysis of the Harvester Shock Troopers' CPUs have located a thought matrix that allows the survivors to transmit data back to the others and allow them to adapt to the battle field. There's an old Earth sayingâ€|and it's thisâ€|'no plan survives first contact with the enemy'. This means that anything, everythingâ€|and something can and will always go wrong in the combat zone. There's no guarantee that everything goes like clockworkâ€|that is what I am preparing you for. The situation of the battle can change in a heartbeat, and as such, you have to adapt to the battle ground and the atmosphere as it changesâ€|or else you will regret it, or worseâ€|is that understood?"

"Yes Sir!"

The women chorused as well, Cortana then appeared with several unknown devices as the Spartan took off his helmet.

"Now we're going to talk about CQC, and if you recall you're training back on Camp Genesisâ€|that is the acronym for Close Quarters Combatâ€|so get ready and head for the practice mat ASAP."

The women left the scene and were placing aside their weaponsâ€|which were all loaded with blanks with the exceptions of the M90A Shotguns as they each had one live round in them. Buzam watched and decided to speak to the Spartan and Cortana. The two then gave her a salute as a greeting.

"I wasn't expecting you here Commander Buzam, is there anything you need?"

The woman saluted the two in greeted and then shook her head and merely replied back to the Spartan as it seemed that he had a training session to teach.

"Nothing Master Chiefâ€|I came here to observe how you were doing."

The Spartan nodded and then excused himself as he changed out of his Mjolnir out of sight from the others and when he came back he was dressed in his black tank top, and grey pants with military boots, the clothes going against his usually pale white skin as he went to the front of the matt. He then started the training exercises as the women began to warm up their bodies and got into the pace of things.

Buzam was somewhat surprised to see Meia among the observers, she had not expected the Dread pilot leader there due to the fact that the two had a rough start working together, however, Meia was not causing any trouble for the Spartan as both he and Cortana began to teach the women the various moves and techniques associated with the CQC curriculum and methods. She had to admit that seeing that Meia was not hostile to the battle-hardened Spartan was a good sight. It was then that she noted several Harvester Shock Troopers nearby.

At first she panicked and then noted that the units were all non-functional and when she walked over to the units she found Parfet and her engineers working on the units that appeared to have been salvaged.

"What are these for Parfet?"

Parfet looked at Buzam and replied as she placed the last touches on her laptop and the program that was installed into it.

"The Master Chief asked if we could salvage and rebuild these units that were still intact from all the fighting and reprogram them with new combat data and new CPUs, I think he wants the crew under his command to have as much realistic experience as they canâ€|though we've toned down all the weapon systems in the units so they are all non-lethal."

Buzam inspected all the units and noted that all of the rebuilt and reprogrammed Harvester Shock Troopers were ready and primed for useâ€|though for what, the Commander had no idea. She then directed her attention to the women as they began to spar with one another as the Spartan and Cortana watched them and gave them pointers and tricks to use in a close range fight.

As the practice runs were done, Buzam went back to the matt as the women crowded around the Spartan and one of the Fire Team members decided to ask the Spartan just what was the purpose of learning CQC. She and the others wondered just how effective CQC was in such a battle fieldâ€|on their mission previously and the battles they had fought in when the Nirvana was being boarded by the Harvesters, they had never used their CQC training in any of the battles.

"Permission to speak sir?"

"Go ahead."

"What's the whole purpose of learning CQC Tactics? I mean, we have our weapons to deal with the enemy right? Why do we need to learn how to fight at such close quarters?"

The other women took up the question and the Master Chief could tell that they would need to see just how important it was to learn how to fight in an up-close situation when they already had ranged weapons

to use. The Spartan knew that they would someday ask that question, he himself was skilled in CQC, though not in the same caliber as his other Spartan comrades, but he knew enough.

"The reason you learn CQC is the fact that not all of your battles will be out in the open, you need to be ready for any kind of fight. And not all of the fights will be in the way of what you'd expect. Guns will become too risky to use in certain battle-grounds and you will have to fight your foes up close. There will be instances where you will have no weapons and as such, it pays to use the weapons you already have—your hands and feet, and your mind. To further illustrate that—I had Parfet and her Engineers reactivate some of the Harvester Shock Troopers which were still intact and salvageable fight me and I will not use either my guns, or my Mjolnir Mark VI—I will only use close combat weapons."

The women were stunned and sure enough, they heard the footsteps of the same Harvester Shock Troopers that were reactivated in the halls. They all turned as the Spartan stood alone on the middle of the mat and he was given a pair of sheathed Combat Knives by Cortana—along with a strange handle like object.

The Spartan then gave the order for the women to move back even further as the rebuilt Harvester Shock Troopers, numbering six in total surrounded the Spartan and extended their left arm blades with a deadly hiss of metal on metal. The Spartan hardly seemed worried as he got ready and took out the two knives he had been given. Three of the Harvester Shock Troopers were the first to lead the attack as they moved in.

The Spartan, bare of his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor was calm and focused as he held the knives in a patient and calm grip—and then with his speed at full tilt, he attacked the Harvester Shock Troopers, much to the stunned looks of everyone in the room, including Hibiki who was surprised that his mentor was fighting the Harvester Shock Troopers with no guns and his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor.

The Harvester Shock Trooper that was in the lead tried to stab the Spartan with its blade, but the Master Chief quickly sidestepped the attack and lashed a kick right to the knee of the Harvester Trooper, forcing it to back away as the Spartan was incredibly strong even when bare of the Mjolnir Mark VI Armor. The Spartan then reversed his grip on the knife in his left hand and launched a powerful punch to the sternum of the alien fighter, just below the chest armor plating. The Harvester Shock Trooper managed to recover, but not before the reversed knife in the Master Chief's left hand pierced its throat and the Spartan then kicked the Harvester Shock Trooper hard, forcing it to fall down with the knife still imbedded in the throat.

The Spartan ducked a wide swing to his head from the second Harvester Shock Trooper, but he then grabbed the extended arm and with the use of the Harvester Shock Trooper's own momentum and his augmented strength flipped the Harvester Shock Trooper. The Harvester unit hit the mat hard and the Spartan followed with a twist and broke the left arm where the elbow would be—the Harvester Shock trooper barely had time to recover before the Spartan smashed his fist right in the neck and then stabbed the Harvester unit in the face with the other knife.

He then moved away as the third Harvester attacked with a downward stab, the Spartan faced off with the third one and evaded several more blows from the Harvester Shock Trooper. The Spartan evaded the attacks and quickly sidestepped the next stab and got close to the Harvester Shock Trooper and the Spartan landed a nasty right hook, and he quickly moved around the Harvester Shock trooper before it could recover, the Spartan kicked both the knees of the Harvester Shock trooper on the back, forcing it to land in it's knees, and placed both hands on the head and with brutal, clean, effective and precise powerâ€twisted the head in such a fashion that the neck broke once more.

The Spartan then faced the other three and took out the handle and then as soon as the Spartan held the weapon, a slight hiss of energy fluxing was heard as two energy blades popped out from the ends of the strangely but well made handle that was being held in the middle by the Spartan. The women, including Buzam and Meia, along with were now allowed to see the Covenant weapon known as the Type 1 Energy Weapon/ or known as the Energy Sword.

The blades were uniqueâ€totally unlike the shape of swords as there were two blades, the base curving on the outside near the blade emitters, the curving arcs of energy then tapered off to the points. The plasma based energy weapon was deadly and could kill even those soldiers armed with energy shieldsâ€the Master Chief should knowâ€more than once he was at the receiving end of such a weapon and when he was able to use it, it proved that it was not to be underestimated just because it was only used in close range combat.

The Spartan moved and blocked the incoming strike and kicked the fourth Harvester Shock Trooper hard in the stomach, he then leaped and swung the weapon on a powerful spinning arcâ€slicing off the head of the Harvester Shock Trooper. As the Harvester Shock Trooper fell to the ground headless, the Spartan traded blows with the fifth Harvester Shock Trooper and then he moved aside from a diagonal slash and knocked the arm aside and stabbed the Energy Sword right into the chest of the Harvester Shock Trooper, the weapon, while being an energy based weapon was in a solid form and thus ignored the passive shielding of the Harvester Shock Trooper. The weapon skewered the Harvester Trooper, the Spartan followed with kicking the slain opponent right into the sixth Harvester Shock Trooper.

The sixth Harvester Shock Trooper barely had time to move the body of it's slain companion out of the way as the Spartan leaped forward and lunged with the Energy Sword. The Spartan lunged the sword right into the head of the Harvester Shock Trooper, skewering it like a fish and then the Spartan landed on his feet and with amazing swiftness, took out the Energy sword and with one powerful slashâ€cut the Harvester Shock Trooper clean into two with the blade slicing the mid section cleanly in half.

The Spartan looked on at the results of the test in CQC and then released the handleâ€making the blades of the Energy Sword fade away and he was now looking at his Fire Teamsâ€all of them, including the NCOs were looking on in awe and shock at how efficiently the Spartan could dispatch his foes without any guns or his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor. Everyone in the room had seen the videos that showed him in the tests that were run by Duero a few months beforeâ€however to actually see the Spartan fight with his abilities in full tilt was a

totally different matter and even more so since he was bare of his signature Mjolnir and weapons.

The Spartan then asked the engineers to help him as he moved the destroyed bodies off the mat and he silently gave the order for the women to listen up. As soon as the bodies were out of the way he spoke to them.

"What you see is an example of why CQC is part of you're training, there WILL be times you will have no other weapons, but you're bare hands, feet, and you're mindâ€¦so it pays to keep them at a fine edge, is that understood?"

"YES SIR!"

Buzam felt her boredom cease as the Spartan once more went on with the training. Dita then came on the scene and since she had entered the crew quarters on the UNSC section to go to Hibiki's room, she was not able to see him talking with the Spartan.

"Where are you Mr. Alien?"

Dita still held her newly created pillow as she entered Hibiki's room in the UNSC section, she first peeked under the blanket of his bunk bed and then she tried looking under the toilet of all things, and she even peeked into his locker.

"Where is Mr. Alien?"

She then looked at the large piles of boxes and other materials that Hibiki had brought with him when he transferred his living quarters to stay under the guardianship of the Spartan. It appeared that while Hibiki was growing up under the Spartan's watchful eye, he had yet to learn proper cleaning methods as the place was in somewhat disarray. She then smiled as she decided to tidy the place up a bit. She quickly moved the boxes and placed them in a good order and looked about to find a duster and began getting rid of the dirt and dust in the area, along with a broom. As soon as she was done, she decided to pass the time making some changes to the room and when she was done, she was tired and lay down on the bed as she had placed the pillow she had made for Hibiki.

It was a few minutes later that Hibiki came on the scene and was stunned to suddenly find his room immaculately clean and filled with strange alien items and it didn't take very long for him to see Dita sleeping on his bed.

"What the heck is going on here?!"

He rushed over to the sleeping female and couldn't help but feel the sensation of being invaded of his privacy as he was unused to this sort of thing.

"Hey! Wake up!"

Dita then woke up and smiled at Hibiki in her usual fashion and spoke to the Vanguard pilot, who was still somewhat livid at this invasion of his personal space.

"Welcome home Mr. Alien!"

"This is not my home! This is my room, stop calling me Mr. Alien and tell me what the heck are you doing in my room and sleeping in my bed?!"

Dita looked Hibiki, who was still not very happy at his invasion of privacy and then she smiled as she got off the bed, making Hibiki back away as he was still wary of what the redhead had in her mind. As much as Hibiki tolerated Dita's quirks (at least in his mind) and her glomping on occasion, along with admire her cooking, he was still unused to dealing with women.

"What do you think? I made you're place neat and tidy!"

"Neat? Tidy? What the heck is wrong with my room?!"

Dita then recalled the gift that she had made for the Tarak teen, which made Hibiki even more steamed at her for not answering him for the sudden changes she had just subjected his room to. Just as he was about to ask her what was going on here, she presented the pillow and smiled at him.

"Here! I made this for you!"

That was the last straw in Hibiki's mind and he reacted and shouted while telling Dita to leave him alone as well as throwing out all the decorations inside his room.

"GET OUT!!!!"

John-117 and Cortana looked over to where the disturbances were coming from along with the rest of the Fire Teams who were surprised at the sudden shouting that came from the crews quarters. The Spartan saw Dita there on the floor clutching a pillow with a lot of other decorations and Hibiki in a steamed mood, while the young woman looked stunned and sad.

The Tarak teen then turned to find himself staring at the very stern and calm gaze of his mentor as the Spartan spoke to him.

"You want to explain to me what's going on here?"

-----

Laterâ€¦

"He was so angry with meâ€¦I only wanted to give him a present for all he's done."

Dita sat in the Dread Squadron planning room with Meia and Cortana beside her. The Dread pilot was not in her current element as she had no idea on how to deal with personal relationships, but she was not liking the sight of the bubbly redhead being this withdrawn and sad. Cortana likewise liked Dita and enjoyed the redhead's company at times, while she explained things to the young woman.

"Wellâ€¦you have to admit that you were invading his privacy and that doesn't always suit well with some men, and Hibiki's one of them. Most men I knew value their personal space and their privacy and



don't take kindly to have those places suddenly invaded by anyone."

"I have to agree with Cortana on that one Dita, you were not supposed to just barge into Hibiki's room and do all that, despite you're intentions."

Dita sniffled a bit and replied.

"But I just wanted to thank Mr. Alien for all he did for usâ€|and to make him smile too. I want to see Mr. Alien happy and smilingâ€|but why doesn't he smile when I do those nice things for him? All he does is get mad at me, what am I doing wrong?"

Cortana and Meia looked at each other, somewhat at a loss for answers to Dita's question. They could understand her desire to get closer to Hibiki, but they each had different takes on the matterâ€|for one, Meia was not very familiar or sure on how to approach the matter as it had been quite a long time since she had ever formed relationships with others ever since joining the pirates and as such, had no knowledge to speak of. Cortana on the other hand knew about these sorts of things and had already forged a strong relationship with John-117 over the many times they had worked together as part of the UNSC, and she was beginning to take their relationship to the next levels, and as such was more familiar with such things, however she was not sure exactly how she should tell the redhead how things worked between men and women. It made it harder for her since both Dita and Hibikiâ€|by their respective world standards were treading on unknown territory as they had no idea how to approach and deal with each other.

Meia then spoke to Dita as patiently as she could.

"Ditaâ€|I know I'm not very good at this sort of thingâ€|but I think that you shouldn't just go barging into someone's heart if they don't want to let you in."

Dita stiffened as she realized what Meia was saying and she then looked at Cortana with sad eyes and she asked the former UNSC AI something.

"Is it true? Mr. Alien doesn't want me near him?"

Cortana sighed a bit and replied.

"To be honest, I can't really answer you that Dita, but you need to give him some space and time for himself. I think he needs it right now sinceâ€|well, you have to admit that since he's from an all male world and that certainly means he doesn't know how to deal with women completely. So until he's more comfortable with you I suggest you give him some space."

Dita thought about the advice handed to her by both her friends and wondered if she should leave Mr. Alien alone, but no matter how much the advice made sense, it still hurt her that she had to stay away from Hibiki.

-----

Speaking of whomâ€|

"So that's what happened?"

The Master Chief was currently wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor with his helmet on as he gazed at his charge. Hibiki felt like he was a bug under a microscope, or a condemned man facing the firing squad as he looked at the golden visor of his mentor. The Spartan was not very happy when Dita left the UNSC section in tears and it made him very unhappy with Hibiki's actions, and he wasn't the only one as the female members of the six Fire Teams all glared at the Vanguard pilot, while Cortana and Meia followed Dita to try and console her.

The Spartan told the Fire Teams to let him handle this as they were allowed to take a rest break from training and they took it to mingle with their comrades. The Spartan in the meantime was checking out what exactly had happened between Hibiki and Dita.

"Yes sir, I just can't stand her suddenly barging in and doing things that don't make sense to me at all! And she's always calling me Mr. Alien! Why can't she call me by my real name?! It's not that hard is it?"

The Spartan can understand Hibiki's frustrations as he kept in mind that since Hibiki was from an all male world, he would know next to nothing about women and their natures in the least. Not that it meant he knew more about women than Hibiki since many of the women he worked with including Cortana were all in the armed forces of the UNSC. The only civilian woman he had contact with was the founder of the Spartan II Program, Dr. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, the woman was like a mother to him and Cortana's own 'mother' as well. But on the topic of personal relationships he had no clue.

Sure he had a relationship with Cortana but it was on still unknown ground now that she had been given a human body. He admitted that he was attracted to women once in a while, but he always curbed those thoughts aside as he had to do a job as a soldier, and being stuck on a nearly all female ship was a bit difficult and new to deal with. And Cortana was very much an attractive woman in her own right and since she still teased him on occasion, he noticed her a lot more than most. However he honestly still had no clue as to how to approach the subject of co-gender relationships though he was no stranger to hearing talks of fraternization among the men and women of the UNSCDF on more than one instance. Not to mention the fact that he knew that his close friend Sergeant Major Avery J. Johnson was married.

"Those things are not enough to warrant you yelling at her and throwing her out of your room Hibiki."

"But"

"No buts, what you did was uncalled for and insulting."

"But I"

The Spartan sighed a bit and shook his head at his charge and replied to Hibiki.

"I'm hoping that things will work out Hibiki, but I am not in the

mood for this to happen again, the both of you are now part of the same crewâ€¦so learn to work together. I want you to sort this mess out between you and Dita soon."

"Begging pardon sirâ€¦but why don't you help me?"

"No Hibikiâ€¦you started this mess between you and Ditaâ€¦you're going to be the one to clean it up. Think of it as a way to learn how to deal with other people, especially women."

-----

In the Bio-Parkâ€¦

Dita was busy throwing stones at the artificial river as she tried to make sense of why every time she tried to get closer to her Mr. Alien, he would push her away. She thought about the advice that Meia and Cortana had given her regarding how she should approach Hibiki, but it was hard for her to understand why this seemed to happen.

"Why? Why? Why? WHY?!"

As soon as she threw the last stone she sighed and looked even more sad as she sat down.

"I justâ€¦I just wanted to get to know a little more about Mr. Alienâ€¦"

It was then that her friend Paiway showed up and showed a picture of Dita from behind and it seemed different from a normal picture as there were waves coming out Dita's form.

"I took a picture of you with the new aura camera that Parfet made for me, Ditaâ€¦are you depressed?"

Dita looked sadly at Paiway and replied not in her usually cheerful and happy tone.

"Isn't that obvious?"

Dita then got even more depressed as she looked back at the river and recalled one of her sadder memories growing up back on Megele a long time ago before she joined up with the pirates. She had a pet blue-bird, a small bird that she doted on as a little girlâ€¦but it became weaker and weaker until it died.

"It's just like the time I was still a kid and I had a pet blue-bird until it passed."

"A pet blue bird? I didn't know you had one before Dita."

"Yeahâ€¦It was the very first pet I ever had before, It was so full of life and energy and I doted on it every dayâ€¦I fed it right, I took care of it the way I was told howâ€¦and it was fine at firstâ€¦but every day it began to lose its strength and energy and got weaker and weaker until it died."

Paiway thought about it and then spoke to her best friend.

"Wellâ€¦did you ever think that maybe it tired and died because you kept messing with it and trying to barge into it's life?"

That quickly got Dita alert and active as she looked at Paiway with shocked eyes. Paiway was just joking, hoping to make her friend think about other things, but she was surprised that Dita was now looking at her with shock and intensity that slightly unnerved her.

"Are you trying to sayâ€¦Are you trying to say that I'm doing the same thing?"

"What same thing?"

"That I'm making Mr. Alien tired too, like my pet blue-bird before?"

Paiway then used her frog puppet and answered her best friend's urgent query using her puppet as the one to do the talking as she normally did on such occasions.

"Well I did hear Hibiki once say that he gets real tired when he's around Dita."

The statement stunned Dita as she thought that when she was near Hibiki, he would eventually become tired and dieâ€¦just like her pet blue-bird all those years ago. The image of Hibiki lying on the floor dead all because of her filled Dita's heart with pain and fear as her eyes widened at the thoughtâ€¦and to hear from Paiway that Hibiki himself said thatâ€¦made her speak in a whisperâ€¦

"Heâ€¦said thatâ€¦"

Paiway had intended it to be merely a joke, but she realized that Dita had taken her joke very seriously as she looked even more sad and depressed and the apprentice nurse was not expecting this to happen.

"Ditaâ€¦"

"I get itâ€¦I have to face facts don't I?â€¦ I'll just be in his wayâ€¦"

That made Paiway panic as she didn't want her best friend to suddenly become like this, she was afraid that what she said was hurting her friend. Though she was not very happy with Dita always hanging out with either the Spartan at times and most of the time with Hibiki, she still wanted Dita to be happy.

"Hey Dita, wait a minute! I didn't mean it was that bad! Hey come onâ€¦I was just making a joke, you understand right? I was kidding. Ribbit, ribbit"

However, Dita was becoming inconsolable as she moped on the floor of the Bio-Park. Unknown to the two of them, they had another observer as Cortana looked at Dita and Paiway. Despite being a bit further away, her exceptional hearing caught on what Dita and Paiway were talking about and she didn't need to rely on the same hearing to see how depressed Dita was when she misinterpreted Paiway's innocent joke. She realized that things going to get even more complicated as

Dita looked so sad.

"Oh boyâ€|this is definitely not going to go wellâ€|"

-----

On the bridgeâ€|

Magno was currently relaxing on her chair in the bridge when she was hailed by communicuÃ© coming from none other than Meia.

"Captain, if it's not too much trouble, I would like to have the Dreads practice special formations and attack patterns with the VanDreads acting as support and attack roles."

Magno sighed and looked at the young woman.

"Meia, why don't you at least take a break for just a few minutes. We're not under attack right now and the crew need some time to cool of f and blow some steam out of the way."

Meia coughed a bit and replied.

"Captain, if I may be so bold, our world and that of the men happen to be under threat from the Harvesters who have already shown how ruthless they are towards humans. We cannot afford to get too comfortable just because we are not under attack. The difference between life and death for all of us could be the hours we spend either relaxing and losing our edge, or spending it wisely and keeping the edges sharp."

As Meia signed off to begin the meeting, Magno could only sigh at how likeminded Buzam and Meia were, she hoped that someday, the two of them could at least loosen up and enjoy what life had to offer them. But right nowâ€|all she could do was wait and let them have their turn.

-----

In the Meeting Roomâ€|

As Hibiki entered the room, the other Dread pilots were already in the room, namely Jura and Barnette, along with Gascogne and Meia who was giving the briefing. Meia naturally looked at him as he pretended not to care that he was a few minutes late.

"You're late."

"I've got a lot on my mind, so sue me."

As he made his way to one of the nearby benches, Meia then noted that Dita was not with him and that was already odd in itself and decided to find out from the Tarak teen if he had managed to find out just where Dita a had gone to. But Jura was the one who asked the question ahead of Meia.

"Have you seen Dita?"

Hibiki turned and glared.

"Look, I don't know where she is and why do I have to always know where she is? It's not like I'm her guardian or her baby-sitter all right?! Geezâ€¦it's bad enough that all these questions are being asked, and now the Chief wants me to fix this whole thingâ€¦"

Hibiki was still trying to sort out the mess he was in and trying to find out what to do with the mess between him and Dita and he was getting even more annoyed when the others ask him on where the redhead was.

"Oh dear."

Jura said as she was somewhat disappointed that Hibiki was acting like a louse. Gascogne on the other hand was sighing as she said her take on the situation between Hibiki and Dita.

"Sounds to me like the two of them have a lovers' quarrel or something."

That made Hibiki even more steamed and annoyed as the idea of a man and a woman being intimate, it was unheard of on Tarak for a man and a woman to be intimate. He of course knew about the relationship between the Master Chief and Cortana, but neither of them were from Tarak or Megele and as such, the rules didn't apply to them, but they applied to him very well and Dita. So naturally he was not very happy with the insinuation.

"What was that?! You've got to be kidding me! There's noâ€¦!"

The door opened once more and all of them turned to seeing none other than Dita who was very subdued and that was a bit surprising to most of her comrades, including Meia herself, though she recalled what state Dita was in previously when she and Cortana were talking with the redhead before. The other Dread pilots were also surprised at the sudden change in the normally perky and cheerful apprentice Dread pilot. It didn't take very long for two more guests to arriveâ€¦namely these two were none other than the Master Chief in full armorâ€¦and Cortana as well.

The two took to listening in on the situation and the Spartan glared at Hibiki, making the Tarak teen gulp a bit as he looked back at the gold tinted visor of his mentor, getting the silent message to find the time to patch things up between him and Dita or else the situation was certainly going to get worse. Meia took that to note and spoke to Dita.

"You're lateâ€¦!"

"I'm sorry, it won't happen again."

As Dita took her seat and tried to evade Hibiki's gaze, the Tarak teen had to admit that this was not something he normally saw in the redhead, though there was the time that Meia had been injured and how sad the redhead was. This on the other hand seemed different than those times as he recalled. He wondered just how long was that woman going to be in such a slump over all that, he had expected Dita to have returned to her usual self, but it seemed that his expectations were not going to be fulfilled today.

Meia sighed as she began to speak to the gathered Dread pilots, while

acknowledging the two members of the UNSC, both Cortana and John-117 nodded and stood back.

"We're going to be working on some new formations that will incorporate the VanDreads, including the VanDread that is formed between me and Hibiki and the one between Hibiki and Dita. The VanDread that Dita's Dread forms with Hibiki's Vanguard will form the mainâ€|"

"I won't do it."

The people looked at Dita with some surprise as they had expected the redhead to jump at the chance to combine with Hibiki as she normally did. Even Hibiki was a bit surprised at that sudden statement as John-117 and Cortana looked at one another. Even Meia was surprised at this sudden change of attitude from the apprentice Dread pilot.

"Pardon?"

"I said I won't combine with Mr. Alien and his partner anymore."

The announcement made Cortana frown, while John-117 couldn't help but shake his head, while Hibiki was somewhat surprised by that statement as he also looked at Dita. He wasn't the only one as Barnette, Jura, Gascogneâ€|and rather just about everyone in the room was stunned at this sudden change in the redhead.

Jura wondered just what Dita was driving at and decided to see if she could tease the redhead a bit since she knew that Dita would never allow anyone else to combine with Hibiki but her, though she had to admit, that it was seriously tempting for her since this would give her the chance to finally combine with Hibiki.

"Aha, I get itâ€|You're starting to get bored with Mr. Alien, aren't you? So I take it that you won't mind if I combine with Hibiki, Dita?"

Dita shook her head and replied.

"Noâ€|I just realized that Mr. Alien is not happy with me being near himâ€|so I don't mind that you combine with him Jura."

Jura looked stunned, but had a grin at the back of her mind at that idea, and gave a slight peek at Hibiki. The Spartan saw that and could only shake his head once more.

Meia sighed as she looked at Dita and made the apprentice Dread pilot look at her and she stared intently at Dita and looked at her apprentice sternly.

"Dita, we don't have the time for this, we are in a meeting for the defense of the Nirvana and the lives of our comrades on this ship are on the line, this isn't a game you can just stop playing, and this is not the place for you to take your personal problems, is that understood?"

Dita looked at Meia and nodded solemnly.

"Yes Meia."

-----  
Laterâ€¦

Meia was looking at the screen where the rest of the pilots had already gone off to do their duties while she was being kept company by Gascogne, Cortana, and the Master Chief. As she watched the screen it came on with Barnette showing up first on the screen and gave her report.

"Barnette here, I've finished with my link-up with the simulator."

Jura was the next on the screen and gave her report.

"This is Jura, I've also finished linking up with the simulator, can you read me Meia?"

Meia replied and then tried to contact Dita to see if the redhead was already done linking up with the simulator. Meanwhile, Hibiki was currently dressed up in his Marine Body Armor even if it was a simulation while in his Vanguard's cockpit, he then directed his attention to a nearby item that he quickly recognized as something Dita owned, which naturally was an alien toy of some sort. He gave a groan and reached out to remove itâ€¦unmindful of Dita's voice coming from the communications network, but as he took the alien toy into his hand to remove itâ€¦he stopped.

He looked at the item and just held it there and began to think on what he should do about his situation with Dita, after all, he had to admit that the Spartan did have a point on him talking to Dita and straightening this entire mess out. It was then that he got a message from none other than Jura.

"Well thenâ€¦I'm ready and waiting."

Hibiki turned and found Jura looking at him with a seductive look on her faceâ€¦making him even more wary on what the blonde woman had in her mind, though he knew that ever since she had seen him combine his Vanguard with Meia's Dreadâ€¦and Dita's as well, she was dying to see just what sort of VanDread her Dread would turn into once it fused with his Vanguard.

"What are you talking about?!"

"You know what I mean by that Hibiki, time for us to combine, don't you think so?"

"Get one thing straight! Just because you're comrade doesn't want to do it with me anymore, doesn't mean I have to do it with you!!!"

In the room, Cortana couldn't help herself as she blushed bright red and laughed, as she knew that considering her own state of mind, she knew that Hibiki had absolutely no idea what the meaning of that statement was. John-117 was still wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI and therefore had his face hidden away by the helmet and it's visor, but even he couldn't help but smirk ever so slightly at the statement Hibiki made. Both of them were quite aware of the truth behind men and women, along with the moreâ€¦intimate details, but they had



already decided not to talk about that sort of thing in the possibility that it would cause chaos on the ship.

For now, the two decided to look on as the Dread pilots went on with their training, Dita however had been in her Dread and heard the exchange between Jura and Hibiki, she clenched her hands as she tried to resist the urge to tell Jura to leave Mr. Alien alone, she was torn in wanting to talk to Mr. Alien and leaving him alone so nothing bad would happen to him because of her being around him

This situation was the reason when she was called in by Meia on the inter-com, she had not been able to hear the orders Meia was giving her. Cortana and the others noted that and knew that with Dita's mind on other matters, she was not going to be an effective pilot.

Gascogne noted that as well.

"This isn't going to work very well, the girl's got her mind on other things."

-----

On the bridgeâ€|

Buzam was busy giving orders to the bridge crew, she was not in the mood for the Nirvana to be suddenly blindsided by the enemy and as such she had ordered the crew to maintain sensor sweeps of the area. Including long range scans of the surrounding sectors.

"You worry too much Commander, why don't you rest for a bit and relax? Here, have something to eat as well, this is very good."

Buzam turned to look at Ezra as the young mother showed her some of the cake she was eating. Ezra was a bit embarrassed also as she had to admit that she was eating quite a lot for a long time and yet she couldn't help herself.

"I know I eat a lot, but I can't really help myself right nowâ€|all the food tastes so good and I can't stop eating so much."

"You're eating too much dear."

Pyoro said as the Navi-robot looked at Ezra, while Buzam sighed to herself and spoke calmly.

"Great, if she's not trying to fight off her desire for sleep, she's going through the food like being on a sugar rush."

-----

In the galleyâ€|

The crew were all taking breaks and even Cortana and the Spartan were also taking a good break with the rest of the crewâ€|ass several of the female Fire Teams were also in the galley eating their food since the MREs that were in the UNSC section were reserved for missions and operations for the day. As the people moved on, the Spartan and the former AI looked to see that the gap between Dita and Hibiki was

getting bigger as Hibiki was all alone on his table and still wearing his Marine Body Armor while Dita sat next to Meia dejectedly and seemed to be not interested in eating her food.

The two looked as Duero was about to sit down, but the doctor then moved away, much to Hibiki's surprise and from what the two could see Duero said something that apparently didn't sit well with Hibiki as he got angry once more and began to munch on his meal at a much faster and more vigorous pace.

The Spartan could tell from his partner's looks that she was itching to get involved and help seal the rift between the two but he knew better than to charge headlong into something like this neither he nor Cortana knew the first thing about serious relationships and the one brewing between Dita and Hibiki was something that had to be settled between both parties.

-----

Later

Hibiki sighed as he took off his Marine Body Armor as he was in his room, and he was getting more and more tired and frustrated at the current situation between him and Dita.

(Why does she have to be so darn sensitive about everything?)

As he sighed and moved away to his bunk, he then spotted the very same pillow that Dita had tried to give him. He reached to it and move it away, but he stopped as he sat on his bunk and decided to just look at it for the time being. He had to admit that now that he thought about it his actions were somewhat uncalled for as Master Chief had said. Dita always came and gave him food and there was something about her smile that made him feel weird, but not in a bad way that still made him curious. He took up the pillow and looked at it as he also recalled the food that Dita would give him she was a nice person

But what annoyed him was her constant hovering over him, she should at least be able to tell when a guy wanted some privacy and time for himself. He wanted to have his own space too, and having it being intruded by anyone every day did have a tendency to get very frustrating and very disturbing to a normal man. He was always having his privacy broken by Dita and dealing with her energetic personality made him tired and cranky.

However his time with the Master Chief and seeing the women under his command change from belligerent to cooperating did seem to tell him that maybe there was a way this mess could be fixed.

"Feeling lonely?"

Hibiki turned and found himself looking at none other than the floating Navi-robot Pyoro. He frowned slightly at the robot as the Tarak youth knew that the Navi-robot and him don't exactly get along very well and the last thing he needed was the floating robot picking on his current state of nerves.

"What the heck do you want from me this time?"

The Navi-robot noted the pillow the Hibiki had in his hands at that very moment and gave a sly look through it's screenâ€|this annoyed Hibiki once more as he was not liking the look the Navi-robot was giving him.

"Are you lonely because Dita isn't here to see you?"

Hibiki glared at Pyoro and shouted.

"You listen you broken piece of robot parts! I am not in the mood to talk about those things! What I feel about that woman is NOT you're business! She makes me feel tired and I am so annoyed with her butting into my private space all the time! I hate people who don't give me some privacy once in a while and she's the worstâ€|"

Hibiki calmed down a bit as he realized that he was only going to make things even worse for himself and took a deep breath and tried to recall that despite his issues with Dita, there was still some good out of all thisâ€|however, things were not going to turn out very well as he heard a gasp.

The Tarak teen turned and spotted none other than Dita who looked at him with a look of shock and utter sadness. Dita had gone to visit him and apologize and try to follow Cortana and Meia's advice on how to approach Mr. Alien. But now that she heard all thatâ€|she felt her heart break and tears began to form in her eyes.

The minute Hibiki saw the results of his words on the redheadâ€|he suddenly had this feeling of being a louse and an inconsiderate jerk. He realized that he had just busted his chance of patching things up between him and the redhead. He then tried to say something, but the words didn't seem to come out of his mouth rightâ€|

Not that he would have a chance to say much as Dita backed away from him and then rushed off in tears and crying. The whole thing took at least two minutes as Dita left the room in tearsâ€|leaving Hibiki and Pyoro aloneâ€|gaping at the scene.

-----

In the corridorsâ€|

(He said it! He hates me! Mr. Alien really hates me!)

Dita tried not to cry out in sorrow but couldn't help herself as she shed even more tears and she wanted to talk to someone to help her with her situation and she knew of only one person that could help her with her problems.

-----

In the galleyâ€|

Ezra was once more eating a large cake in order to satisfy her cravings, she was not alone in the galley as several of the crew were also working, along with none other than Cortana. The former UNSC AI was happy to be eating again, and since she had a much more effective metabolism than most people, she could eat a lot.

The two heard the door open and they turned and saw Dita in tears,

Cortana's normally witty and simple smile faded and was replaced with a look of great concern and worry, while Ezra gasped at the state Dita was currently in.

"Dita?"

"EZRA!!!!"

The redhead rushed into Ezra's arms and cried her heart out while Cortana could only look on and it didn't take long for her to put two and two together and she couldn't help but get a bit angry at Hibiki once more.

-----

Elsewhereâ€|.

Jura looked at her guest in her room and she seemed to be in the mood for a very important discussion with that particular guest.

Bart Garsus had no idea as to why he was called in by the female blonde Dread pilot and as a man from Tarak, he was taught from birth that women were not to be trusted and were conniving, deceitful, and had ulterior motives. But since there were no threats to him to speak, he decided to ask the question that was hounding him the very moment that he was asked come to here.

"What exactly is it you want from me?"

"I want you to help me on something."

Bart looked on in surpriseâ€|the idea of a woman asking a man for help was somewhat unheard of, and he was getting even more curious as to what the blonde Dread pilot was up to.

"What is that something anyway?"

"I want you to be able to keep an eye on Dita, she's always managing to get you're comrade Hibiki for herself. If you can keep her occupied, then I can finally be able to combine with Hibiki and the Vanguard."

"Okayâ€|that part I can understand, but you might want to give me a reason why I should help youâ€|what's in this deal for me?"

"Simpleâ€|if you can keep Dita away from Hibiki for enough time for me to finally combine with Hibiki and the Vanguard, then I will help you gain more respect and popularity on this shipâ€|and I can bet that you would like that, won't you?"

Bart nodded as he felt that the amount of respect that he was getting from the rest of the crew, even from Cortana and the Spartan was the kind given only to pond scum.

"So what do you have in mind?"

-----

Laterâ€|

"Is that what happened?"

Cortana asked Dita as she, the redhead, and Ezra were sitting on a table in the galley and eating some cake, the former AI was still not happy with the results of what had just happened between Dita and Hibiki, but she decided to let things work out for themselves, getting involved now would not make things any easier.

"Yes—he was arguing with Pyoro—and he—"

"It's all right Dita—maybe you both need to spend some time apart for now, but I think you're still on good terms with Hibiki. Oh dear—I really should be more careful—"

"But ever since recovering from morning sickness, you've developed a very healthy appetite and ate a lot."

Cortana said with a slight quip and smiled at how the young mother continued to eat her cake—it made the former AI wonder if this was how mothers—human mother felt when they had their children in their bellies before giving birth to them. The woman wondered how it must feel for a woman to have a child. She wondered a considerable deal on this for some time when she found out that Ezra was indeed pregnant. However, she put that aside as she saw the looks of sadness on Dita's voice.

"I know—but I—I feel that there's this emptiness in my heart—I don't know—"

Cortana thought about that and decided to get involved, she was not in the mood to see the redhead this down and out all day and it was making her even more annoyed with Hibiki's nature as a man of Tarak. She knew that John-117 saw this as a matter between the crew, namely between Dita and Hibiki, however she was not the kind to let things settle for long as she felt that this situation should be done with soon and the two would get together once more.

"Listen Dita, if you want—I can help you with your situation with Hibiki—I happen to be on somewhat cordial terms with him as I am with the Master Chief."

Dita shook her head and smiled at Cortana's suggestion.

"It's all right Cortana—but I think I should change myself."

"Why would you want to do that Dita?"

"Yeah—I don't see why you need to change all that much to get Hibiki's attention."

"I want Mr. Alien to like me! Not hate me! So starting today I'm going to change so he will like me more!"

Cortana was a bit surprised at that and so was Ezra—but before they could say anything, they watched as Dita began to vigorously eat the cake that was before her—making the two women look at her with slight apprehension as she ate.

"She's hit the complete mental break down stage—all because of

Hibiki."

Paiway said as she was hiding underneath the table as she recorded the whole thing on her trusty note-book.

-----

In the Registerâ€|

Gascogne was busy working on the usual details of the Register since most of the crew were currently taking a break. While she didn't mind the rest period, her training in the old days in the military of Megele didn't fade away as she worked on the important details and made sure to check and double check everything.

The head Supply officer then turned as the door of the Register opened and in came Hibiki wearing his Marine Body Armor and in came the Master Chief as well, wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI. The Spartan was currently free of his duties and was not training as he had to check on other matters before heading back to the UNSC section to get in some more training time to hone and sharpen his skills in the shooting range. Besides that, he decided to visit the Register on the off chance that he could find Cortana working there.

Gascogne smiled at the two men, she found Hibiki to be rather interesting and worth talking to and needling at the very same time, though not too muchâ€|while the Spartan was certainly a man who deserved her respect and he did rescue her along with Hibiki and Dita before. Plus talking to Cortana when the woman was under her command certainly allowed her to know a lot more about the Spartan more and that to her was a good thing.

Hibiki looked and followed his mentor's actions as he saluted Gascogne just as the Master Chief did as well.

Gascogne followed the salute and spoke to the two men.

"What brings you two down here?"

"I was planning to talk to Cortana Miss Gascogneâ€|is she still working here?"

"I'm afraid notâ€|last I heard she was with Ezra in the galley. And what brings you here Hibiki, I certainly don't have any new duties in the Register for you."

Hibiki shook his head as John-117 decided to speak.

"Well thenâ€|we'll be taking our leave."

"Hold on you twoâ€|how about a game?"

The Spartan and the Tarak youth looked and saw that the older woman holding a deck of cards in her hand. Hibiki smirked and decided to play Gascogne's game, while the Spartan was a bit more uneasy about the whole thing since he was not much of a card player in any way, shape, or form, and had no experience with cards to speak of.

Gascogne noted that and smiled at the Spartan.

"Don't worry Master Chiefâ€¦there's no serious betting, just a friendly game of cardsâ€¦you don't know how to play poker?"

"I'm afraid not Miss Gascogne."

"Wellâ€¦now's a good time to learn don't you think?"

-----

Laterâ€¦

Dita was currently recovering in the Medical Bay. She had recently been using a new telescope with Parfet and when she was talking about her relationship with Hibiki, Parfet talked about her own desires, though the mention of love made Dita blush bright red, and it made Parfet even more surprised at her friend's behaviorâ€¦ and the head engineer then told Dita about the new computer that she made that had all the crew members data and it could be used to find the person you were most compatible with. Despite her wish to keep away from Hibiki for his own goodâ€¦the redhead couldn't help but wish to know if she could be with Mr. Alien. However, it seemed that the data concerning Hibiki was so much that it fried the computer and stunned Ditaâ€¦

Thankfully the redhead was unharmed as Duero was busy examining her.

"Hmmâ€¦well, you don't appear to have suffered any scarring from the event, and you have no visible wounds, plus the body scans have shown no internal damageâ€¦you'll be fine in a few minutes Dita."

"Thank you Mr. Doctorâ€¦"

"Not a problem Dita."

"I'm so relieved! I really sorry Ditaâ€¦.I have no idea that it was going to happenâ€¦"

Parfet said with a great deal of sorrow as she had feared that her actions had something to do with Dita's sudden fainting.

"It's all right Parfet, I'm fine."

"Is this the first time you've fainted like that before?"

"Yeahâ€¦I've never fainted this way before."

"Exactly what were you feeling when this happened and can you describe it too me?"

"I don't knowâ€¦all I felt was this rapid beating in my heart, I couldn't breathe and there was this feeling of lightheadedness and confusionâ€¦and the next thing I knewâ€¦I fainted and I was here."

Duero thought it over and wondered just what sort of malady did Dita suffer for her to be like that while searching Hibiki's information

in the data-base that Parfet had come up with. But since he had no data to work with he couldn't give a more effective diagnosis.

"All right thenâ€¦just get some rest and try not to overexert yourself."

"Yes Mr. Doctor."

Duero turned and spotted several discrepancies in his computer system and tried to figure out just what exactly was wrong with the computer in the Medical Bay, this had been always giving him problems and despite the fact that he was in his own admission not an engineer, he tried to fix the problem since Parfet was a busy person, but he was making no headway in his efforts in trying to fix the problem.

"Again?"

Parfet cocked her head to the side and wondered just what was wrong with the Medical Bay computer as she and Pyoro were in the room as well.

"Let me see that."

Parfet walked over to the console and began her magic as she ran the systems diagnostics and she finally was able to pinpoint the problem.

"No wonder this thing is acting this wayâ€¦the network circuit's been cut for weeks! This should be repaired and replaced as soon as possibleâ€¦why didn't you tell me that you've had this problem Doctor?!"

Duero looked at Parfet with a guilty expression and gave his explanation as to why he had not taken the time to call her.

"I'm sorry for not calling youâ€¦But you were very busy with all you're duties in the ship that I thought that it would have been unwise to have you taken from those duties only for this sort of thingâ€¦"

"Nonsense! Every device on the ship is my duty, and that includes everything here in the Medical Bayâ€¦now I'll need you're help to fix this problem."

Dita smiled as she saw the relationship between her friend Parfet and the Tarak physician and it made her sad that her relationship with Hibiki was not the same as that of her friend and the Doctor. Pyoro noted that and tried to talk to Ditaâ€¦

"Ditaâ€¦"

The redhead told Pyoro not to say anything as she left the Medical Bay, and the Navi-robot moaned out is worry as the two turned to see Dita leave the Medical Bay.

-----

In the Registerâ€¦



"AW NUTS!!!!"

Hibiki shouted out in frustration as he lost his next hand in cards as Gascogne was sweeping away the winnings, while the Spartan was still calm and checking his cards, the Master Chief then looked at his student as Gascogne took in her winnings yet again—the two had been playing for several minutes and already they had lost ten hands to the skilled card player. The Spartan had to admit that since he spent most of his time in cryo-stasis on the off times between mission, he hardly had time for any past times—not that he would have any with the constant fighting to begin with.

"To be honest with the both of you, you both are the worst card players I've played with."

"Oh yeah! When I beat you, you'll be regretting those words!"

"Oh?"

"Keep you're cool Hibiki—you won't win if you go out like a half cooked meal now won't you?"

"Yes sir—"

Hibiki said as he took up his cards once more and drew his next pair, while the Master Chief calmly shifted through his cards. Gascogne nodded on the difference between teacher and student—while Hibiki did manage to be like his Spartan mentor—he still had his hotheadedness and his arrogant nature—while the Master Chief was calm and patient, never showing his emotions when they were not needed—of course—with his Mjolnir Mark VI on, the Head Supplier couldn't be entirely sure about her assumptions on the silent soldier.

John-117 shifted to his cards and placed down his hand—

"Two of Clubs."

"Royal Flush."

The Spartan shrugged as he let Gascogne take his share of the chips and merely worked on improving his game with cards as he worked on his strategy to beat Gascogne. Hibiki however was still going at it as he bet another losing hand—

"Three of a kind!"

"Full House."

"Nuts! I've had it! What's the point of all this anyway?!"

Gascogne looked at Hibiki and sighed.

"The point of cards is to read you're opponents' emotions through their face or body a\languages and also to be strategic and patient. I thought you learned those things while you were under the Master Chief?"

"That's different!"

"Calm down Hibiki and use those lessons I thought youâ€¦cards is a game of strategy and chanceâ€¦same as warfare."

Hibiki sighed and sat back down as he tried to think of the game of cards in the same way he would have done during training simulations under the Master Chief's guidanceâ€¦however he was getting distracted as he remembered the situation with Ditaâ€¦while he did try to place such things out of his mind.

The two older people in the room noted that and the Spartan was the very first to bring it up.

"You're still thinking about what happened between you and Dita?"

"No I'mâ€¦not."

"Don't lie to me Hibiki."

"Wellâ€¦yeah I am, I still don't know how exactly I am supposed to deal with this sort of thing."

Gascogne reshuffled the cards once more as she knew about the whole thing from the get go.

"You really should amend the situation you knowâ€¦she's not performing well in any of the training simulations and she's very depressed, and need I say lonely?"

"Why don't you do something about it then?!"

"Need I remind you Hibiki that this situation started between you and Dita, and it does not involve the rest of the crew? It's you're mess, therefore it's you're responsibility to fix it."

"Begging Pardon sirâ€¦but exactly how am I supposed to do that?! I don't know the first thing about talking to a girl, let alone apologizing to a woman!"

Gascogne looked at Hibiki and had to admit that he did have a point, he was from Tarak and therefore the idea of apologizing to a woman must be totally foreign for a man of Tarak to do, and also very much unheard of. But if there was one thing she knew for certainâ€¦it was that you would never know what would happen if you didn't try in the first place.

"Try talking to her and keep that temper of yours in checkâ€¦at least try and stop losing you're cool when she's around and let her have her say before you say anythingâ€¦Dita's a sensitive woman, but she's very forgiving and kind hearted. You should be thankful Hibikiâ€¦I've personally never seen Dita this kind towards a man you knowâ€¦"

Hibiki thought about that and knew that there was considerable truth in her words and sighed as he decided to get this all said and done with before things get even more hectic, though he still struggled on just how he was going to approach this situation.

As the Tarak teen left the Registerâ€¦allowing the Spartan and the

Register Officer to play their game, he runs into none other than Pyoro himself as the Navi-robot floated along and there was a reason for it as wellâ€¦it was looking for Dita and hoped that the redhead was all right. He looks at the Navi-robot and Pyoro looked back.

"What is it?"

"Are you lonely?"

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

"Becauseâ€¦Dita's very lonely too."

As the Navi-robot left a stunned Tarak teen to find the redhead, Hibiki scratched his head and tried to figure out just what the heck he was going to do to deal with this situation and decided to take a trip to the one place he knew which would be quietâ€¦the Bio-Park.

-----

The Bio-Parkâ€¦

Dita looked at the viewing area while she was at the middle of the Bio-Park, near the very same spot where she and Hibiki had their little picnic before their mission on the desert planet. As she thought about those times and she sighed, thinking about how she would have to change in order to be nicer to Hibiki, but she was still afraid of facing him since she was still not very sure on how he would react if they would face one another again.

However, that decision was taken out of her hands as Hibiki spotted her and walked towards her. He wasn't sure just how he was going to resolve this whole mess, but he kept the Master Chief and Gascogne's words on his mind and he knew that unless he got this situation off his chest then he would never get his head straight. As he made his way to her, he stepped on a twig and the sound alerted the redhead and she turned. Hibiki noted that she was getting scared of him and the idea of her being frightened of him hurt him in a way that he still didn't understand, but he was not going to let this chance to settle things between them as Dita was about to leave.

"Wait! Hold on! I want to say something to you!"

Dita was surprised as she stopped moving away and looked at Hibiki and for some reason she felt this sudden flush of embarrassment as she looked at Hibikiâ€¦who to her slight surprise was looking to be also in the same boat as she was. She couldn't help but stand and twiddle her fingers and await what Hibiki had to say.

"W-W-What is it?"

"Wellâ€¦uhâ€¦it'sâ€¦umâ€¦how should I say thisâ€¦?"

Hibiki scratched his head as he tried to figure out how exactly was he going to settle this mess, he did make it clear that he didn't know the first thing about talking to a woman, but he knew that now that he started this, he might as well finish this discussion.

"Iâ€¦wellâ€¦I wanted to say thatâ€¦"

"Yes?"

"Iâ€¦oh this is hardâ€¦.I, uhâ€¦want toâ€¦"

"What is it?"

"Iâ€¦wantâ€¦to apologizeâ€¦.about uhâ€¦yelling atâ€¦you."

Dita was naturally stunned at that statement as she looked at the slightly blushing and stuttering Tarak maleâ€¦of all the things that she expected from Hibiki when they would meet again was this, but she felt her heart become lighter and lighter as the words played in her mind over and over. She wondered if that meant thatâ€¦

"Youâ€¦don'tâ€¦.hate me?"

"Noâ€¦.I, this is really hardâ€¦.anyway Iâ€¦"

Hibiki's planned words never left his mouth as Dita glomped onto him tight, catching him by surprise as she smiled and sniffled a bit. Hibiki was knocked down and he fell flat on his back with a huff. He was surprised and was not happy but the Tarak teen then noted that Dita was smiling as she hugged him and for some reasonâ€¦he decided not to let loose his anger once more.

"Thank you Mr. Alien!"

Hibiki groaned a bit at the fact that she was still calling him Mr. Alien, but before he could bring that to light, something began to register in his headâ€¦he recalled that Dita was right in top of him and for some reason his body began to heat up and strange sensations began to fill his nervesâ€¦of course he was not the only one.

Dita herself began to feel strange sensations as she lay on top of Hibiki as she felt his body below her own and unknown to both of them, they were in a very compromising situation as the two looked at one another for a moment while the two of them were blushing deeply.

Hibiki didn't know why this was happening to himâ€¦he had just gone there to talk to the redhead and settle things between them so she would stop acting this way and he could finally not have these strange feelings in him. It workedâ€¦but now he had new strange feelings in himâ€¦and unlike beforeâ€¦they didn't annoy himâ€¦but excited him instead!

As the two looked at each other's eyes and their blushesâ€¦they began to inch closer to one another unaware of the implications of what they were doing as they came ever closerâ€¦

However, fate had other ideas as the alarms sounded, breaking the two from their trance as the Harvesters had once more made their appearanceâ€¦the two looked at one another for another moment before Dita got off Hibiki and helped him up to his feet with a smile, showing that she was back to her normal cheerful and energetic self once more. As the two left for the hanger bay and soon headed out to

fight the Harvesters, the women noted the changes and were somewhat relieved and were getting more curious as to how this situation is going to play out.

As the Spartan got his Fire Teams ready for possible boarding actions, he wondered a bit on what will be the situation now that Hibiki and Dita had patched up their relationshipâ€¦as despite his duties he was getting a bit curious how this was going to turn out himself.

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

-----

#### Author's Notes:

Not very action packed now is it? Then again, this episode was mostly in time when the Nirvana crew are taking it easy for a change and the situations between Hibiki and Dita are certainly different, at least not too different from the previous stories. But you can bet that the other relationships will be bloomingâ€¦namely when the Master Chief John-117 gets involved.

Now on the next chapter, we get back to the part where the Master Chief is taking names and giving the Harvester a good old fashioned butt kickingâ€¦but he's going to meet a certain somebody you and I both know. Rabat is going to face off with the Spartanâ€¦

And if you think Hibiki's going to get his butt kicked like in the old seriesâ€¦then think again cause the Master Chief's lessons in combat are about to kick in and he's not going down without a fight. Rabat will have the upper hand for a few moments, but as soon as he crosses paths with the Master Chiefâ€¦things are going to get REALLY nasty.

#### Trailer:

-----

Rabat spat out a wad of blood as he tried to get to his feet, the trader had just been send crashing into several large crates while he was in the Hanger Bay of the ship. He had managed to beat the punk kid but the kid had certainly fought hard.

He looked to see Hibiki standing up and cradling his side and bleeding from the mouth, but the Tarak teen was not bowing down as he glared back at Rabat, while Dita was nearby helping him.

The trader tried once more to get to his feetâ€¦but he felt intense pain almost instantlyâ€¦it was as if he had been hit right in the chest by a wrecking ball!!!!

He spat out another wad of blood and spat out some more as he finally managed to get to his feet, but then had to duck as a fist smashed right into the wall behind himâ€¦he heard the sounds of metal crushing and he looked at the wall and his eyes widened at the sight of the metal with a large and two inch deep impression of a fist in itâ€¦The blow would have crushed his skull like a rotten melon had he

not ducked in timeâ€|though barely

(My Godâ€|what the hell is this guy?!?!?!?!?!?)

John-117 looked at his foe as he was bare of his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor and moved his fist away, the pain in his hand was negligible and hardly bothered him as he grabbed the tunic of Rabat and hauled the man to his feet and held him there like he was nothing but a feather pillow. The Spartan was looking at Rabat with his calm and emotionless face and spoke.

"You have fifteen seconds to get off this ship and never come back traitorâ€|because if you come back, if you dare show you're face on the Nirvana and try to charm or harm it's crewâ€|"

The Spartan then gripped Rabat's throat and was nearly choking the traderâ€|Rabat felt as if his throat was in a vice as the Spartan's grip was very terrifying indeedâ€|The Spartan then looked Rabat straight in the eye and gave out a cold, emotionless, but very icy threatâ€|

"I'll kill you."

-----

See you at Chapter 10 Confrontation!!!

## 11. Chapter 11

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: I do not own Halo or VanDread, the two belong to their respective owners, which are Gonzo for VanDread, and Bungie for Halo.

### Chapter 10

#### Confrontation

( ): Thoughts

-----

The Nirvana was currently near the perimeter of an ancient space station surrounded by asteroids and those were connected by tubes and connectors, it had been constructed during the Colonization Era of Earth. The old station shared the same name-tag with it's fellow stations and that name was Mission and they all served as temporary havens for weary travelers and merchant ships, acting as supply depots for many centuries. However, this particular Mission was abandoned and now was nothing more than a derelict hulk by the time the Nirvana came across it. However the captain had ordered an exploration and salvage unit into the station in hopes of getting any more data concerning their enemies, and also get some extra supplies and parts for the ship.

Currently, Meia, Parfet, Jura, Barnette, Dita, Hibiki, the Master Chief in full armor and weaponry, Cortana, and Pyoro were onboard the mission.

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

"So that is what a Mission is? I've never seen one in my whole life before."

Buzam commented as she looked at the station through the view screen along with the Captain, which was very much the truth since there were no such stations as this one anywhere near Megele or Tarak for that matter and this was her first viewing of one such station.

"I knowâ€|I remembered them when I was young, they prospered during the Colonization Era and served well as a haven and trading postâ€|but now with the Colonization Era over, it just stays thereâ€|I hope we can find some useful materials still in that old ruin."

Magno replied as she recalled the old days when she was a little girl back in the fleet.

-----

In the Missionâ€|

Meia was busy removing several parts from some of the circuit boards in the Mission's main data core archives, and along with her was Cortana, who being a former AI knew just what parts were needed and what were not, as she helped the Dread Squadron Leaderâ€|she was currently dressed in the same outfit as she normally wore, but had one the Marine Body Armor vest. Parfet was along as well in order to salvage what other parts the others might have missed

Next to them was the Spartan carrying a MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and an M6G Magnum on the side, Hibiki was there as well..dressed in his own Marine Body Armor and carried another M6G Magnum. The Tarak teen was trained by the Spartan how to use the weapon, but told him to only use it in self defense since the Spartan didn't want him to just shoot without reason. The rest of the Fire Teams were on security in the Nirvana, since the Master Chief was more than capable of handling things on this salvage mission. He needed them to protect the ship, while he would take a ride in the Longsword fighter that he took to get there. Pyoro came along as wellâ€|though for what reason, the Spartan had no idea.

Jura and Barnette were currently moving about in the other part of the station, Barnette was looking for food, cooking supplies and moreâ€|while the ever fashion conscious Jura was more in the mood to find new clothes for her wardrobe. Her plans with Bart didn't work, but that certainly didn't mean she was giving up the notion anytime soon.

Back in the data storage centerâ€|

"It's great that the Captain recalled this Mission, we might be able to find what we need here for the time being."

Parfet replied as she took several circuit boards and data drives for testing later on back in the Engineering Bay on the Nirvana. While

the Navi-robot was explaining to Dita just what the station was.

"That's enough chatter you twoâ€¦we've got a lot of work to do here and we're wasting time talking."

Meia said towards the two as she continued her work on the parts that she knew the pirates needed to keep the ship operationalâ€¦however while she was doing her dutyâ€¦another person or robot for that matter was not.

"This is work? All you're doing is looting the place."

Meia sighed and replied back to the small floating robot.

"We're not looting this placeâ€¦we're here to salvage parts and equipment that's no longer being used. This station's very much abandoned and no one resides here anymore, so we take the parts and what we find and put them to good use."

"You should make the orders clearer then."

"Don't so picky Pyoroâ€¦"

The Spartan quickly turned and clicked the safety off his MA5C Assault Rifle and looked to the rafters, and so did Hibiki as he took out his M6G, both men looked around at first and the Spartan quickly made some hand signals to the Tarak teen. Hibiki nodded and placed down his salvage and placed his gun before him and took out the Combat Knife that he also had.

Meia was surprised and spoke.

"What are you two doing?!"

Hibiki gave the signal to be silent and he watched the Spartan as the Master Chief looked around and then after a few seconds, the Spartan gave the signal to move out, Hibiki nodded and he then turned to Meia and spoke.

"The Chief's heard somethingâ€¦we're not alone on this stationâ€¦better tell the others."

Meia's eyes widened that that and she quickly got on her communicator to contact both Jura and Barnette and warn them that they were not alone as she knew that considering the military training and experience that the Spartan hadâ€¦he would not be lying. Dita tried to follow but the Spartan shook his head and spoke to the redhead.

"Stay here with Meiaâ€¦Hibiki and I will handle this."

The two men then moved out in formation as they covered each other with their weapons while Pyoro followed the pair. As the two arrived in the alleywayâ€¦the Spartan halted and looked around the area and then gave signals for Hibiki and a plan. Hibiki got the idea and nodded as he went ahead while the Spartan moved around and used the other passages to circle around.

As Hibiki moved through the corridors where the shops were located,



he was followed by Pyoro who tried to keep up with the Tarak teen, but had a hard time due to Hibiki's physical training and conditioning in his time under the Spartan. The pair arrived before a courtyard and the Tarak teen looked about.

"What's wrong?"

"It's hereâ€|there!"

Hibiki turned upward as he spotted movement on a nearby beam and aimed his Magnum right at the being that appeared to be making all the noise his mentor heard. He activated the laser sights on the weapon and spoke in a clear voice as he tried to keep calm and focused.

"Whoever or whatever you are, you'd better come down right nowâ€|I'm giving you a fair warning!"

In a moment, the being responded and fell down the rafter and landed before the Tarak teen and the Navi-robotâ€|making Hibiki pause as the being was not humanâ€|or even a Harvester.

"What the heck are you supposed to be?!"

The creature was an orangutan, an old Earth creature that belonged to the Primate family and judging from the clothes the ape was wearing, it appeared to be female. Hibiki didn't know what to make of this creature and so placed away his Magnum to try and figure out just what this creature wasâ€|

The orangutan however was not very convinced of the boy and then directed her attention to Pyoro, and before Hibiki could react properly, the female orangutan dropped the parts she had and leaped towards Pyoro and before the eyes of the Tarak teen, the ape began to slobber all over the Navi-robot and lick it affectionatelyâ€|much to Pyoro's absolute displeasure and discomfortâ€|which it made known.

"AAAAUGGGGHHHHH!!!! STOP IT!!! THAT'S SO UNSANITARY!!!! HIBIKI!!! HELP!!!!"

Hibiki could only gape in shock as the presence of the orangutan, since not only was it the very first time he had ever seen the creature, but he had no idea as to what to doâ€|however, he barely had time to react as he felt his trained senses warn him of danger as he turned and took out the Magnum and aimed it.

Hibiki spotted another being in front of him and this time, it was a man, the man was taller than him but a few feet and appeared older as well. He was dressed in a tunic and pants, with boots, and from the way he dressed, this man was certainly not from Tarak. He had several stripes of paint on his face and had what appeared to be some sort of eye-patch on him as well, a technological one at that. The man was well built and appeared to have a body builder's build on him. Hibiki felt something thoughâ€|something off about the man before him.

The man seemed to be a fighter of some sort, but he had this strange aura of sneakiness in him, as if there was something that spelled trouble about him. Hibiki had been taught to not trust strangers easily by the Spartan and to not leap in when he was not sure of what

he was facing and who he was facing, the Spartan's training paid off as despite seeing that the stranger was a man like him, he was not going to think he was an ally right off the bat.

Hibiki kept the Magnum right at the man's head and didn't take his eyes off of him as he spoke.

"You're not a man from Tarakâ€|who are you and what's your business on this mission?"

The man didn't even bother to acknowledge Hibiki's question and the Magnum aimed right for his forehead and spoke to the orangutan.

"Stop that Utan and come here."

The female orangutan eeped and moved over to its apparent master and showed the person Pyoro, the man's smile was not friendly in the eyes of the young Tarak teen as he didn't like the looks of that smileâ€|that was the smile of someone planning something dangerous and the way he looked at Pyoro was that of a very greedy person.

"Well nowâ€|a functional Navi-robotâ€|who'd think there'd be one of them in this musty and dark old place? I bet we can make quite a bit of cash with this oneâ€|once we strip him down to parts of course."

Utan gave a look of shock that and held Pyoro in her arms and made it known to her master that the idea was one she was not going to approve of yet. This made Hibiki even more wary and a bit angry at how arrogant this man was, but he kept calm and spoke out once more.

"Hey, I asked you a question, who are you and what are you doing here on this station?"

Rabat looked at Hibiki and gave him an examination. The boy was shorter than he was and appeared to be at least a strong person, but he was far stronger than this little kidâ€|despite the armor he was wearing and the weapon he had on himâ€|though they certainly don't match any type of body armor and weaponry he had seen before, and the boy seemed competent on the gun's use, considering his stance and posture. But Rabat had not survived being a trader by just examining others.

"Why should I tell you my name? And judging by your garb, you're not from around hereâ€|despite that fancy armor you have on you. Do you even know how to use that weapon you snout nosed punk?"

Hibiki glared at that statement but kept his cool, he would dishonor his mentor if he let this man goad him into a fight.

"What did you call me?"

Rabat smirked and replied.

"What? You don't like that term I called you? How about short stuff then? Or runt?"

"Are you trying to goad me into a fight?"

"If I amâ€¦what are you going to do about it?"

"The only reason I haven't shot you're arrogant mouth off with one this M6G Magnum's bullets is the fact that you're not one of this Harvester Shock Troopers and you are a human being. But don't make the mistake of thinking just because you're not a Harvester and a human that I won't shoot you if you try anythingâ€¦and I happen to be a pretty good shot myself. Now answer my question, and let the Navi-robot goâ€¦now."

Rabat snorted and looked at the boy once more, wondering just who this arrogant punk was and how he was going to teach him a lesson.

"All right then, the name's Rabat, I'm a trader, and I'm here to find supplies for myself and the ship I own, and since introductions are out of the way punkâ€¦why don't you hurry back to you're little bed and put down that thing before you hurt yourself? Play with you're toys and let the grown-ups play with the real guns."

Hibiki glared abut kept the weapon in his hands.

"Not bloody likely you arrogant assâ€¦now let go of the Navi-robot."

"Or you'll what? Shoot me? If you really think you're man enough to take me on by yourselfâ€¦why don't you put down that gun and fight me man to man with you're fistsâ€¦or are you too much of a little snot to try?"

Hibiki glared once more and his temper was growing hotter at the second, however something distracted him and he briefly lowered his guard as he spotted Dita, Cortana, and Meia heading towards him. That was all the trader needed as he grabbed Pyoro and hurled the Navi-robot at Hibikiâ€¦the Tarak teen barely managed to spot the flying Navi-robot and was forced to drop the pistol as to avoid accidentally shooting the floating robot. The Navi-robot flew on and struck Meia on the head, forcing the other two to help herâ€¦Rabat knew that things were not looking good and a hostage was what he needed to even up the odds for him, and the brat was close enough.

Howeverâ€¦he didn't count on the fact that Hibiki still had the combat knife with him and the Tarak teen recovered enough to reach for it in a reverse grip and lash out with it, just as Rabat came at him. The trader was able to spot the knife and move out of the way from his attempt, but only barely as Hibiki's attack slashed part of his tunic, but missed the flesh.

Rabat was then tripped by Hibiki with a sweep kick and the trader fell on his stomach, and he was not happy as he planned to get back and deal with that punkâ€¦but as he tried to turn around he found himself looking at the barrel of a strange but dangerous looking Assault rifleâ€¦and the weapon was dangerously close to his neck, he followed the weapon and found himself staring at a massive giant of a man in armor made from green and blackâ€¦while he had a helmet on and a golden visor that hid his face and allowed Rabat to see his own face looking back at himâ€¦and for some reasonâ€¦it made the normally

arrogant and smug man afraidâ€|very afraid.

Unlike the Tarak teen he had faced beforeâ€|the new arrival was giving off the aura of a person who was NOT to be messed around with and Rabat had to admit that he was the one who was now in a dangerous spotâ€|and to his shock the man took out another pistol like the one the kid had with lightning speed and aimed it at Utan who was about to spring at him to stop him, he fired a round in warning and Utan stopped her attempt as the bullet was buried inches from her hands, and the laser of the M6G Magnum was now square on her forehead and the man didn't even look at her direction. And he was still holding the weapon he aimed right at him with no trouble. Rabat was stunned at how fast the armored man could move and the armor he wore was unlike anything he had ever seen beforeâ€|it certainly was no ordinary armor suit that the trader was familiar with. The trader knew there and then not to try anything while the weapon was near him and then the stranger in the powerful armor spoke in a calm and emotionless tone to him.

"Tell that orangutan of yours to stay still because the next time I shootâ€|it's going to be for real."

Rabat knew that for this time, there was no way out of this mess and signaled Utan not to try anything. The orangutan obeyed as the armored man turned to the boy who picked up his own weapon, while sheathing the knife.

"You all right Hibiki?"

"Yes Chiefâ€|I'm okay."

The Spartan then redirected his attention to the traderâ€|he had been able to sneak in close enough to outflank the trader the minute he saw him. The guy spelled trouble to the Spartan as soon as he saw him, the guy might act like a trader, but something told the Spartan that there was a lot more to this Rabat than meets the eye, and like Hibiki, he didn't like what he sawâ€|he looked at the trader and could tell that this guy fought like a sneak and was armed like one as well and from his attempt to attack Hibiki, the Spartan knew there and then that he was not to be trusted. The Spartan then decided to interrogate this one as the others arrivedâ€|along with Jura and Barnette who rushed as soon as they heard the gun-shot.

"Now listen hereâ€|I'm going to let you off the floor and let you get on you're feet so you can talk and explain yourselfâ€|you try anything that can be considered a threatâ€|I'll shoot you."

Rabat nodded as the Spartan moved awayâ€|moving the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle slowly from his neck, and that allowed Rabat to get to his feet, just as Barnette arrived with her Glock 9 pistol drawn and Jura had her sword out. The Spartan then placed aside his M6G and held his Assault Rifle in both hands while keeping the weapon aimed the trader. Meia came and aimed her laser ring as well and glared at Rabat, and so did Hibiki who aimed his own M6G at Rabat.

The presence of the weapons and the Spartan made Rabat realize that combat was not going to solve anythingâ€|so he would have to rely on his mouth to see him through this mess. He would get his chance as Meia spoke to him in a serious tone.

"Who are you and what are you doing here on this station?"

"The name's Rabat, I'm a trader, and like you I'm here to get supplies and parts from this abandoned mission."

"You're no trader."

Rabat turned to the Spartan and spoke to the Super Soldier in the same way as he spoke to Hibiki, just so he could see just what sort of person this guy was.

"What makes you say that?"

"No trader carries high powered pistols, a small grenade pouch, and a pair of hidden knife holsters on him, one on his back and the other in his boot, though you might have other weaponsâ€¦and judging on the way you tried to overpower Hibiki here, I'd say you've been trained in covert warfare and unconventional tactics and no trader will willingly attack anyone unless in self defenseâ€¦unless you have some alibi to prove I'm wrong?"

"Okay so I'm not you're average traderâ€¦so what? I did what I thought was advantageous for me and I'm just trying to make a living."

Meia frowned at the way this guy was going on but before things could get underway, the sounds of explosions filled the air and the Mission began to shake. The Spartan quickly used his COM system to the bridge.

"This is Spartan John-117 to the Nirvana, what's going on?"

"The Harvesters are in the area Master Chiefâ€¦get back here on the double ASAP!"

The pirates got the message and knew that now was not the time to start talking with the new arrival as they all headed off to their respective shipsâ€¦Dita went with the Jura, Barnette, and Meia to their Dreads, while John and Cortana headed off to board the Longsword they both had used to get hereâ€¦while Parfet and the others were now taking to the shuttle. The Dread pilots knew that they had to protect the shuttle so it would arrive safely to the Nirvana. They quickly packed it up and Rabat did likewise and headed to his own ship that he had stored on the other side of the Mission. However, as he and Utan were running, Utan showed something that made the trader smileâ€¦it seemed that the pirates had left something in their rush to defend the ship.

-----

The pirates were all on the move as the Dreads took to space while the Longsword Fighter and the Megele Shuttle made their way to the Nirvana, while Hibiki was also getting into the act. The Dreads were able to shoot down several more fighters of the Harvesters while Hibiki managed to slash down several of the alien fighter craft. Apparently the Harvesters have tried a smaller variant of the Cube Fighter for better success rates on the pirates as the units attacked at full force.

John and Cortana worked in tandem with one another as they both

fought off the Harvesters and protected the Nirvana Shuttle as the Chief handled the weapons, while Cortana dealt with the flying part and it showed their respective skills. The Spartan was by rights a Navy person and was trained in the use of all UNSC vehicles, including the Longsword. As they made their way to the Nirvana along with the Shuttle, the former AI rushed as fast as she could to man the weapons on the Nirvana while the Spartan got ready for possible boarding parties as he called in the Fire Teams to get ready for combat.

As Cortana made it to the bridge and into her holo-tank, she immediately was told by the others how the Harvesters had managed to evade the Nirvana sensors, apparently they had been able to get enough data on the scanner frequencies of the ship's sensors to gum it up and allow their forces a better chance at catching them all unprepared. Cortana was going to fix that pretty quick as she began to power up the weapon systems and targeting sensors. And in less than a few minutes, the Nirvana came alive with shells from the Point Defense Guns and Archer Missiles flying out and slaughtering the enemy like they were all target boards with Cortana at the helm.

On the other side, Rabat powered up his ship that resembled a small sized barge and a yacht in one and the trader began to pull out of the station and spotted the battle, while he liked the looks of the Dreads, he was not in the mood to stay there too long. But it was then that he spotted the Nirvana unleash the Longsword Fighters that got his attention, along with the Vanguard Hibiki piloted.

As far as he knew the fighters that the Nirvana unleashed were certainly not Dreads as though the Dreads could come in all colors and sizes, the fighters before him were all uniform in design and were in a green-grey color scheme and as such were not very appealing to women, but they appeared to be very well armed and were more than capable fighters, even though a few were shot down. He then directed his attention to the Vanguard before him and wondered about the color scheme, overall form and the weaponsâ€¦it certainly didn't match the Vanguards of the men of Tarak he had heard ofâ€¦but the unit certainly was no slouch.

As the battle continued, Hibiki was able to down several more Cube Fighters and then directed his attention towards several more fighters, but as he took one of the alien fighters down with his Vanguard's sword, he was then joined by Jura who contacted him and spoke in her usual seductive tone.

"Well now, let's combine and we can end this ourselves, what do you say?"

Hibiki groaned as he looked at Jura and gave her a look of exasperation.

"We're in the middle of a fight here! Now is not the time for this sort of thing!!!!"

Jura was not about to give up just yet as she followed Hibiki's Vanguard, intent on fusing her Dread with his Vanguard. As she fought off several Cube Fighters, she was now closing the distance to her target and she was now going to create something beautifulâ€¦

But she got beaten to it as Dita's Dread came out of nowhere and

fused with Hibiki's Vanguard to form the first VanDreadâ€¦ suffice to sayâ€¦ the blonde was far from happy with the outcome.

"Dita! He was mine!"

The redhead however smiled back and gave Jura the look as she replied.

"Sorry, but you snooze, you lose!"

"Grrr! I'll get you for that!"

Hibiki sighed as he was still trying to get used to the two women arguing about these things but he put that aside as several Cube Fighters directed their attention towards the VanDread, with that in tow, the Tarak male began to take the fight to the Harvesters.

As they were able to even up the odds, the two of them realized that the Mission was the area where the Harvesters were attacking from and therefore had to be destroyed. As much as Hibiki disliked the idea of having to sacrifice so much workable material and supplies since his people were very much not the kind to waste resources, he knew that it was far better to deny the enemy supplies and equipment than to let them have it.

With that in mind he activated the VanDread's main cannons and locked onto the Mission, the massive cannons locked in on the target and fired their main beams, the energy bolts slammed into the station and obliterated it into nothing but wreckage and scrap metal and a massive flash of light as the beams from the VanDread struck the Mission's still workable power coresâ€¦ further adding power to the explosion itself. The battle was over as the Harvester forces had no support ships and those that were not caught in the blast and the debris that shredded their comrades were quickly dispatched by the Dreads and the Longswords that were controlled by Cortana through her AI commands from the bridge of the ship.

Rabat's eyes widened as he looked at his ship's tactical screens at the VanDread, the machine was NOT a machine he was very familiar with and seeing the utter power that thing had made the trader's eyes alight as he began to imagine the amounts of money he could get from the sale of both the Dread and the Vanguard from eager customersâ€¦ especially certain clients of his who would love to get their hands on the merchandise.

"Did you just see what I just saw Utan?"

The orangutan nodded as well, her surprise evident on her face.

"Then I guess that means we've really hit the jack-pot then."

However, his attention was directed elsewhere as several surviving units of the Harvester forces directed their attention on him, he looked at his scanners and then turned to Utan with a nod.

"Go ahead Utan, knock yourself out."

The female orangutan made several happy noises and rushed up to the

back of the ship, and a few moments later a mecha appeared on the back of the ship and was armed with missile launchers and cannons and as soon as the mecha was out on the ship, the orangutan activated the controls and from the various weapons came barrages of lasers, cannon shells and missiles that filled the void of space.

The Cube Fighters were being reduced into scrapâ€|but Rabat was far from happy as he looked at the weapon supply readouts and saw them all going empty in a span of two minutes, all the Cube Fighters were wiped outâ€|but the mecha's weapons were now bare of any munitions.

"Damnâ€|there goes last weeks trade fundsâ€|"

Rabat then turned his attention to the Nirvana and was once more surprised, the ship resembled a Pioneer class Colony ship, which in itself was interesting enough since the ship class no longer was usedâ€|but what was even more surprising was the fact that the ship seemed larger, more well armored and it was apparently very well armed, and those massive cannons in front of it certainly were NOT standard issue for colony shipsâ€|there was no way that could be a colony ship. It seemed that the mysteryâ€|and the possibility for profit was very much looking very tempting indeed.

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

"What a waste of a good stationâ€|.and all that precious loot that could have been placed to good use."

Magno said as she was flanked by Dita, Jura, Meia, Hibiki, Barnette, and the Spartan who was near Cortana's holo-tank imager.

"That's my loot actually since I was here before you all came."

The crew in the bridge looked to see the image of Rabat as he hailed them via communications relay link. Magno looked at the trader with some suspicion and replied.

"What do you want?"

"My ship's engine got damaged by all the fighting you people started and me helping you ladies out with the stragglers. So what do you ladies intend to do about it?"

Magno didn't like the attitude this unknown man was giving her and so did the rest of the crew.

"Who do you think you are, making demands of us? We happen to be pirates and we don't ask for help."

"Oh really nowâ€|then I guess that means I get to keep this one then?"

Rabat and Utan then revealed Pyoro, much to Dita and Hibiki's shock and discomfort, along with John and Cortana as they realized that they had left the Navi-robot behind. Magno looked on with a measure of surprise at this development and knew that despite being a Navi-robot, Pyoro was part of the crew and his safety was her



concern.

"Hmmâ€¦I guess we have no choice for nowâ€¦you may come onboard."

"All right thenâ€¦I'll be right there."

The Spartan gave a very low but audible growl at thisâ€¦showing his irritation at having that sneak on this ship, he didn't trust the man in the slightest and made it obvious. Cortana noted that as despite being incased in his enhanced Mjolnir Mark VI the Spartan would make certain gestures to show his irritation and she was the only one who could see itâ€¦being his partner and friend for many years.

"Something wrong John?"

The others turned to the Spartan as he spoke as soon as Rabat was out of hearing range and off the comm. link.

"I don't trust himâ€¦he's going to be trouble the very second he's on this ship."

That statement made the others very tense, as they knew that if the Master Chief acted this way, they had to be careful on what they were doing, he only acted this way when there was something of great importance on his mind.

"I have to agree with John, Captainâ€¦I've got a bad feeling about that man."

Cortana said as well as she recalled her meeting with the traderâ€¦or whatever he wasâ€¦for some reason, he reminded her of Colonel James Ackerson, the man who at one point had been the most dedicated opponent to Dr. Catherine Halsey, her 'mother' and founder of the Spartan II Program. She knew Ackerson as he was a high ranking member of ONI and had been pushing his own Black Ops Projects against Dr. Halsey and he had even interfered with the testing of the Mjolnir Mark V beforeâ€¦nearly killing John with ordnance and orders beyond the test guidelinesâ€¦she sent him packing but he managed to weasel himself out of the mess. This guy was not the Colonel in all waysâ€¦but the aura was the same.

"We have to bring Pyoro back hereâ€¦but I have no doubts you and you're Fire Teams can keep an eye on this one Master Chief."

Magno replied to the Spartan just as she had been told by the security teams that Rabat's ship had now latched on the Nirvana. The Spartan gave a slight nod and made his way toâ€¦greet their 'guest'. Hibiki came along as he still didn't plan on forgetting the insults Rabat had thrown at him and the man's attempts to take him hostage.

-----

The Nirvana's Docking Bayâ€¦

As soon as he was able to dock his ship properly and ensure he was in good straits, the trader made his way to the main hold, the trader waited as the door opened and before he knew it, he was greeted by a

large security forceâ€|all of which were female, and very attractive.

"Well nowâ€|this ship certainly has a lot of attractive females onboard."

The trader moved down and began to give several of the women gifts and even tried to give something to Jura, which for some reason, the blonde wasn't keen on getting just yet. Rabat however was being insistent until Hibiki spoke to the man, while still wearing his Marine Body Armor and carrying both his M6G Magnum and his Combat Knife.

"You had better knock it off, what you're doing is disgusting."

"You're the one to talk little boy, I'm just being friendly, that's all."

"Friendly my assâ€|don't think for a second I've forgotten how you tried to take me hostage."

"Well that's not my concern right nowâ€|besides I don't want to waste time with you."

"That's enough."

Both men turned to see Meia who then aimed her laser ring right at Rabat. The aqua-haired girl was not forgetting the event that happened before and she made it very clear that she was not in the mood to have a discussion.

"You're coming with me to see the Captain, try anything and you'll be in for it."

"Yes ma'am, you're wish is my command."

"Knock it off Rabat."

Rabat turned and found himself looking at the Spartan and the giant was looming over him once more, and he took an unconscious step backwards as he found himself staring at the golden visor once more. As much as he disliked backing down from anyoneâ€|there was something about that giant of a man in the green and black armored suit that spelled extreme danger to Rabat. He calmed himself a bit and saw Utan backing away from the Spartan as wellâ€|he then spoke to the Spartan.

"All right then I'll try not to step on you're toes."

As Rabat was led away by both the Spartan and Meia, Parfet got into a chasing run with Utan to get Pyoro back, who the female orangutan was not keen on handing back to the head engineer, despite her please and Jura's insistence that they stopped running around her.

Meanwhile Hibiki gritted his teeth and glared at Rabat as he left the sceneâ€|

-----

In the bridgeâ€|

"The men here, including that young man you first met are from Tarak, they are all prisoners of war and are temporary members of my crewâ€|we are from Megele and we're only on a temporary agreement of cooperation until we return home."

Magno said as she spoke to Rabat, who was being watched over by both Meia and John-117.

"So that's the deal eh?"

He then activated a nearby switch and then spoke to Bart about being careful not to catch a cold when he saw him in the Navigation Well.

He then turned to the side and found himself staring at Cortana who was currently in her holo-tank and thus in her AI form, and Rabat had to admit, that for a hologramâ€|this woman was certainly attractive.

"And who pray tell is that lady?"

"The name's Cortana."

Cortana said with a straight and serious demeanor, unlike her usual witty, sarcastic, and professional self, she still didn't trust Rabat in the slightest at all.

"She's our ship's gunner and ground operations coordinator if you want to know."

Meia replied as she kept an eye on the traderâ€|while she was not using her laser ring, she was more than ready to respond if Rabat tried something.

Cortana then disappeared to Rabat's surprise and then the holo-tank opened and out came Cortana in her female form, and it was there that the trader recognized her as one of the crew of the Nirvana that was on the station.

"Hey I recognize you nowâ€|you're an attractive one too, maybe you'd like to have a gift."

"No thanks."

"I insistâ€|"

"She said no Rabat, leave it at that."

The Spartan said with authority, stopping Rabat cold in his tracks when he tried to approach the former UNSC AI. Rabat then looked at the Spartan and sighed once more as he stood away, he then had a thought and faced Magno.

"I take it you're giant friend here is a prisoner of war as well?"

Magno gave a smile at that question and replied.

"The Master Chief? Noâ€¦he's a special caseâ€¦he's the leader of the Nirvana's security detail, our combat specialist, and leader of the Fire Teams."

"He leads you're forces on missions? I thought women of Megele are against men of Tarak?"

"He's not from Tarakâ€¦it's a little hard to explain and I don't have much time, suffice to say, he is very different and therefore is not subject to the rules Megele has towards men. Nowâ€¦what exactly do you want from us?"

"Not much really, I just want to remain here until my ship's engine is repaired and then I'll be on my wayâ€¦and of courseâ€¦being a trader, I would like to do some trading business while I am here."

Magno looked at him hard and nodded.

"You may do soâ€¦but cause any trouble on this ship and I will have you removed from here, understood?"

"Understood Madam Captainâ€¦"

-----

Laterâ€¦

Hibiki was fuming mad as he paced the room back and forth in the UNSC section of the Nirvana, along with him was Duero and the Tarak teen was not in the best of straits as he recalled how Rabat had acted while they had first met. Right now the trader had set up shop and had been selling his wares, including jewels and other things to the women on the shipâ€¦and the women were going for itâ€¦hook, line and sinkerâ€¦

That isâ€¦except the women who served with the Fire Teams, who noted the slight but present show of hostility their commander, the Master Chief directed to Rabat. They were not entirely sure why the normally calm and collected Spartan would be showing this hostility towards the new arrival, but they knew that their commander would have good reason to act this way and thus, they were wary of Rabat and despite their desire to see his wares as the rest of their comrades, they made sure not to cross paths with him.

"That guy really pisses me off! And the Chief doesn't even trust him!!!! Why the hell is he still here on the Nirvana?!"

"You realize that he is a trader, and he does have legitimate reason to be here, his ship was damaged and will be soon repaired, by then, he will leave."

"That's not the point here! He tried to take me hostage on the Mission and the Chief said that he was no mere traderâ€¦there's something that's very wrong with that guy!"

Duero nodded at that, the Spartan never acted like this before and he certainly showed his displeasure towards Rabat, which was surprising indeed for someone like him. And while he had not acted towards Rabat, he still showed that he didn't trust the man. And Duero had to

admit that something about Rabat made no sense, like Hibiki, he had been in the hall when Rabat came onboard and he observed the man carefully to determine what he can about the trader.

"Maybe you're right, the Master Chief certainly does not trust Rabat, and that in itself is something. Not to mention he seems to know things about men and women we certainly don't know about, with the exception of the Master Chief himself and Cortana as well."

Hibiki paced back and forth once more for a few more minutes, until he could take it no longer and left the room in order to keep a watchful eye on the trader, which the Spartan himself was doing at the very same moment.

-----

Elsewhereâ€|

Rabat had set up shop and was already collecting quite an amount of credits from the women as he plied his wares before them, Meia looked on in wariness as she didn't like the way her crew members were fawning over the goods Rabat brought with him, along with the things he spoke of about his knowledge of men and women. His charm was considerableâ€|but her years on the streets of Megele told her that underneath all that charm, there was something very suspicious about the man.

She turned her attention to the women who were NOT affected by Rabat's charm, who were members of the Spartan's Fire Teams, who while not in their Marine Body Armor and their uniforms and in their usual Megele garb kept a safe distance from the trader. She had to admit that she could tell that they were interested in the jewels, but their respect for their commander and their notice of his suspicions towards Rabat made them very cautious and wary of the trader as they knew that their commander did not trust him.

And speaking of the Spartan, he arrived with Cortana in tow as the two of them looked at Rabat as he still went on with his work. Meia walked over to the two and said her piece.

"I don't trust him at all."

"Join the clubâ€|that guy spells snake to meâ€|and he's becoming a serious problem."

Cortana said with certainty as she kept an eye on the trader, while John himself kept his hands clenched and unclenched them once every so often. It was then that the Spartan spoke to Meia and the others as he studied the man.

"I was watching his ship during the battleâ€|he wasn't even surprised when the Harvesters attacked, and he didn't even come to help out, but merely observed the whole thing, as if he had seen this before. He knows something about the Harvestersâ€|he's trying to hide it from us."

He then turned to Cortana when he spotted the normally level-headed Parfet buy some of the wares Rabat had, and those were engine parts and power couplings. He even saw Paiway trying makeup on, and Rabat saying she should wait a few more years before she tried it on. His

main concern however were the parts that Parfet had bought, this guy was trouble and he was up to something and the Spartan wanted EVERYTHING that guy sold to be properly inspected, and engine parts were certainly of great concern to him.

"Better head back into the bridge and try to access Rabat's ship, namely the data archives—we need to find anything that can shed more light on him."

"On it john."

With that, Cortana left the scene and headed for the bridge, while Hibiki arrived on the scene and then was approached by the Spartan.

"Keep an eye on him Hibiki, and keep you're cool when you follow him—if he tries anything, contact me and the Fire Teams ASAP."

"Where are you going?"

"I sent Cortana to try and infiltrate the data archives of Rabat's ship—I need to know just who this rat is. Until then, you keep an eye on him and make sure he doesn't try anything to endanger anyone on the Nirvana. Is that clear?"

Hibiki nodded and as soon as Rabat made his way around the ship, the Tarak teen followed him, while the Spartan moved back to the UNSC section to make sure that he could lock down the place—no way was he going to let Rabat sneak into the Forward Unto Dawn and steal it's secrets.

-----

Later—

Rabat shook his head a bit as he entered the Hanger bay on the men's side of the ship. He had tried to see the rest of the ship, but one section appeared to be on lock-down and he couldn't access it for some reason. The trader also made a note to avoid the Commander, the one named Buzam A Calessa—something about the statuesque silver haired woman seemed off—he ran into her when she had been in the hanger where his ship was at the very moment. She appeared to be examining the ship that he owned, and when he tried to distract her, he felt something different and as such backed away from her.

As he arrived, he spotted the Vanguard owned by Hibiki, his eyes lightened as he knew that this Vanguard was the key to the whole transformation and could very well be the mother lode he was looking for, though he would still need to get into the Vanguard's cockpit to see just what was the systems on the Vanguard in order for him to find out just how that transformation worked.

However, as he made his way closer to the Vanguard—some else came on the scene—

-----

In the holo-tank on the bridge—

Cortana looked through the data archives in Rabat's ship. The UNSC AI had to admit that while the guy did have some good encryption systems, but nothing that she couldn't bypass. Even though she had been given a human body, Cortana had been given a considerable boost in her abilities, both in her human form and in her AI form, in her human form, she had better physical abilities and was somewhat stronger and faster, though not in the same degree as the Master Chiefâ€|John, for that matter. And her abilities as a smart Ai had improved exponentially while in her AI form, allowing her to bypass and override systems with far greater ease and precision than she did in the past.

As she scanned the information, it didn't take very long for her to find out about Rabat's true nature and his business dealings. And the woman was far from pleased as she read all the data that she could find. It turned out Rabat sold bootleg junk and stolen parts, the man once sold faulty parts to several ships, and no doubt had caused serious damage to the said ships in question, he sold already worthless supplies to people and swindled them out of their moneyâ€|and more, he had shady dealings with arms dealers and who knew what else. One was for sureâ€|this Rabat was not a man that they should associate with.

(This guy's nothing but a con artist, rat, and parasiteâ€|I can't believe we ever let him on this ship!)

She then found a hidden file and quickly began to hack her way into the insidesâ€|what she found were payments, amounts, checks, and chartsâ€|navigational charts.

(What the heck are these? They seem to be the kind used by prospectorsâ€|but there's no way this guy's a miner...let alone a scoutâ€|)

It was when she dug deeper that she realized that the charts were of worlds that have already barrenâ€|but according to the data records, the planets used to have flourishing civilizations of humans, but as she played the time frame, the planets were somehow stripped clean of life and were reduced to being barren wastelands.

(My Godâ€|Rabat's nothing but a traitor! A traitor to the whole human race! But for whom is he working for?!)

She dug in deeper and found the last fileâ€|titledâ€|special clients. The file was protectedâ€|even more so, but she bypassed it and when she read the files, and cross checked the information carefully and when she found out just who was Rabat working forâ€|she felt a new emotionâ€|

Rageâ€|

(YOU VILE BASTARD!!!!)

Cortana wasted no time as she copied all the data into her memory core and then made her way to the UNSC section. The Master Chief was bare of his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor and was busy locking down the storage unit to store the Armor when Cortana showed up on one of the nearby holo-tanks.

The Spartan could tell that the information that Cortana had

recovered was serious and when he saw the data and Cortana told him everythingâ€|he clenched his fists tightly and spoke only a few words.

"That traitor is leaving this ship nowâ€|even if I have to throw him out."

-----

Hibiki managed to follow Rabat's trail and when he spotted Rabat, his blood boiled even further as he found the trader trying to get into his Vanguard and what was worseâ€|was the fact that Rabat was trying to charm Dita.

"Come on, can I just take a peek?"

"No! This is Mr. Alien's partner!"

"Please?"

"I said no! No one but Mr. Alien can pilot it so leave it alone!"

"Aw come on, I'm not going to steal it little missy."

"I said noâ€|"

"Geez you're stubborn, look, he's a man of Tarak as far as I've heard and he doesn't like women, so why don't you just let me take a peek? I promise I won't break it."

"No!"

Rabat leaned down and was going to try once more, but something inside Hibiki was boiling real hot. The guy's actions were sickening to him and the way he was trying to win Dita over were even worse. Hibiki didn't know why, but the thought of Rabat laying a finger on Dita was enough to get him even more angry, he still didn't know why he felt this way and why he was becoming defensive about Dita, but he was not going to tolerate this anymore as he stepped forward and called Rabat's attention.

"Hey you!!!"

Rabat turned and gave a slight snort as he spotted Hibiki, who was bare of his armor and his weapons. Dita spotted Hibiki and she suddenly felt elated that Hibiki was in the same room as her, when Rabat began to charm her in order to get his hands on Hibiki's Vanguard, she resisted and was not going to let it happen.

"Mr. Alien!"

"Step away from that guyâ€|"

As Dita stepped away from Rabat, the trader turned and gave Hibiki a look of arrogant smugness.

"Who are you to tell her who to associate with kid? As far as I knew, both you and her are supposed to be enemies."



"That's none of your business you dirty rat!"

Rabat laughed a bit at that and replied.

"That's all you can come up with tiny?"

Hibiki however kept his cool and then tightened his fists and shouted back at Rabat.

"I don't like you—period, and the Chief certainly doesn't like you either, he doesn't trust you—more so than me, so I suggest you quit acting like you're some big-shot around here and get off this ship—even if I have to be the one to toss you're stinking hide out the nearest airlock!"

Rabat gave up the smile and gave a dark glare at Hibiki and got into a serious posture.

"You know something kid—you've got a very big mouth and you've been quite an annoyance to me ever since I met you."

"The feeling's mutual."

"Hah, tell you what then, you want me gone from the ship and to leave you're partner and you're female friend here—then why don't you try and beat me in a fight. If you, by some chance manage to hit me with enough hits, then I'll consider leaving the ship, if I beat you until you can't stand up, then you leave me alone—deal?"

Hibiki knew that he was in a bit of a bind as Rabat was stronger, taller, and no doubt more skilled than he was since he had previous experience, but he was challenged and as a man of Tarak, he was bound to answer the challenge, if he didn't it would be a blow to his pride and his honor as a man, yet he had to be cautious in this situation since this was going to be a fight for real and one mistake could spell danger, defeat, or worse—

Rabat decided to finally goad Hibiki and give him the pummeling he felt this loud-mouth kid deserved and he was going to enjoy this.

"Well come on—unless you actually got some guts in you, you had better throw the first blow—or are you too much of a loud-mouth with no real guts—you snot nosed brat."

That got Hibiki's goat as he charged right at Rabat, forgetting for a moment his training as he made his plan to finally make Rabat eat the arrogant attitude he had on him and make him pay for trying to think he can just waltz into the Nirvana and try to play the kind man when he was a liar, cheat, and worse.

Rabat smiled slightly as Hibiki charged as he readied his trap for the young man, this was going to be an easy fight since that brat lost it and was charging at him like some rookie who never even got into a serious fight, and he was going to enjoy this. He then made a special signal with his eye behind the eye-patch.

Hibiki had no time to react as the eye-patch suddenly unleashed a powerful and blinding flash of light that forced him to stop and close his eyes, slowing Rabat the chance to go in and slam his knee

right into Hibiki's stomach, making the boy shout in pain and surprise as he was hit hard. Hibiki barely had time to react and clear his vision when Rabat launched a punch combination, one to his side and another to his face—forcing Hibiki back to his knees.

Rabat grinned as he got ready to attack once more, and Dita cried out in fear for Hibiki and she felt this desire to cry for Hibiki and try to stop this, as Rabat was about to kick Hibiki, she was about to rush in and stop this mess, but Hibiki was not going to stop, he knew that Dita would get hurt if she tried to interfere and the last thing he wanted was for her to be hurt. Rabat might have caught him off guard, but that was going to be the last time he was going to make the same mistake.

He blocked the kick and from his position on the floor launched a kick of his own that caught Rabat off guard and the blow slammed right into the trader's gut, forcing Rabat to lean forward, Hibiki then fired a rabbit punch that struck Rabat right on the neck, making the trader gag as he moved back, Rabat growled as he recovered his breath and launched out another punch and Rabat was able to dodge the attack and recalled his lessons from the Master Chief as he closed in and used the punch's own momentum to strike at a nerve cluster on Rabat's arm, causing the trader to feel a fire-storm of pain and the Tarak teen used his smaller size to move behind Rabat and kick Rabat on the back of his knees, forcing the trader to his knees and allowed Hibiki to get some distance from Rabat.

(Damn that brat! I'll get him for that!!!)

Rabat got to his feet and growled as he launched several attacks at Hibiki, the Tarak teen used his training to equalize as he dodged, evaded, and blocked the incoming attacks, but he still knew that while he was stronger and faster than he was before he took the training the Spartan had given him, he was still outmatched in sheer strength and size by the trader. And that was proven true as he managed to block a punch, but Rabat then grabbed his tunic and punched him hard on the chest and the trader tossed him aside. Hibiki was hurt badly, but he could tolerate it due to the same training he had been given by the Spartan.

He evaded another knee strike and used it to his advantage as he used the knee to move him upward and he connected his knee to Rabat's chin, making the trader's teeth slam together, and making him bleed, the Tarak teen then launched an elbow strike to Rabat's nose, making it bleed, but Rabat recovered and landed his own elbow to Hibiki's shoulder, injuring the young man and sending Hibiki to the floor, and Rabat kicked him hard—forcing Hibiki to slide to the floor as he held his ribs from the pain, but he glared defiantly at Rabat. Rabat was really angry as he approached Hibiki, the boy proved to be a good fighter, but the trader was angry now and vowed to really make Hibiki pay for those attacks as he drew out a pair of knuckles made from hard metal and vowed to make the boy bleed badly.

"STOP IT! LEAVE MR. ALIEN ALONE!!!!"

Dita rushed up to stop Rabat as she held Hibiki, she knew that what she was doing was very dangerous and she could very well be hurt, but she was not going to let Mr. Alien get hurt even more by this man who truly proved to worthy of Mr. Green Alien's distrust.

"No! Stay behind me!"

Hibiki didn't know why, but he was not going to let Dita get hurt by anyone, namely by the bastard before him. Despite the pain on his ribs he moved to stand and shielded Dita from possible harm. The teen didn't know why he was doing this, but he didn't care. And this was his fight, he didn't want Dita to be hurt and to interfere as well. Rabat looked on and snorted at the two of them.

"Don't worry, this will all be over brat."

As he launched an attack with the knuckles he felt that one good clean blow was all he needed to finally make this punk suffer for having such a big mouth. However his attack didn't connect with Hibiki's face and his arm with the knuckles appeared to be in the grip of something that resembled a high powered vise. No matter how he tried to move his arm to strike at Hibiki, he couldn't even move a millimeter at all. He turned and found himself staring at a man with deep green eyes who seemed to be as pale as snow itself and was as tall, or slightly taller than he was. The guy liked to be a cross between his own build and that of a gymnast, but there was no mistake the strength this guy had as no matter how hard Rabat tried to move his arm he couldn't even budge an inch.

The man was wearing a black tank top and grey military pants with boots and was pale skinned all over, but the thing that got Rabat's attention was the aura of zero emotion, calm, efficiency, precision, power, and more. There was something dangerous and lethal about this guy. But what really got Rabat surprised was the fact that he had never seen this guy before, ever since he boarded the ship, he had never met this guy before, and that was what really worried him. The trader managed to get some breath and spoke to the new arrival.

"Who are you? I don't recall meeting you before?!"

The pale skinned man then replied.

"You and I have already met Rabat. I was the one who had that Assault Rifle on your throat."

That was enough to jog the trader's memory as he recalled facing that green and black armored giant of a man with the golden visor, and his sense of uncertainty returned and he now knew that this was not going to be a good situation. The now unarmored Spartan glared at Rabat coldly and then with a near negligent toss of his hand, sent the trader a few feet away.

Rabat groaned as he got to his feet, still surprised that this guy could toss him at least six feet away with just that casual toss. He then decided that maybe the guy was just lucky and without that battle-suit of his, he could even up the odds with the Master Chief once and for all. The Spartan however was not in the mood to play games today however as Cortana had told him everything there was to Rabat that she had been able to dig up on him.

"You're leaving this ship right now."

"And for what reason is that? I just want to settle accounts with that kid who's not stopped disturbing me and butting into my

business."

The trader said as several more members of the Nirvana came on the scene to witness just what was going on with Rabat, the Master Chief, Dita and Hibiki. Even the Captain and the Commander were there as well, along with members of the Nirvana Fire teams, the Security Teams, and the Dread Squadrons, including Meia, Barnette, and Jura.

"You're nothing but a gutless parasite who sells bootleg junk and you con people out of their own hard earned savings, you feed on the misery and sufferings of others for your own benefitâ€¦you don't deserve to be called a human being, but a parasite in human skin. I've seen the records of all you're dealings in faulty equipment, expired supplies, fake materials, and stolen goods Rabat."

The trader and con artist looked on in anger as the Spartan spoke the truth, though how he found out about the things he did were a serious concern for him. He however was not going to be intimidated this time.

"Who do you think you are to try and tell me how to do my business?"

"Does your business include selling out other human worlds to be Harvested Rabat?"

THAT got the attention of everyone on the Nirvana right off the bat as they all looked at Rabat and the Spartan, wondering just what John was talking about. Rabat had a sinking feeling in his gut and tried to keep a cool head as he spoke once more.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Don't even think you can lie to meâ€¦I looked at the data in your ship that I had Cortana retrieve while it was in dry dock and we copied ALL the information in themâ€¦including the data concerning your special clients, the ones who pay you a huge bounty for every human world you visitâ€¦and not just to tradeâ€¦no doubtâ€¦but to assess their offensive and defensive capabilities, their standing forces, and how many viable individuals there are on each worldâ€¦no doubt you even try to get the locations of their home planetsâ€¦all for your clients who pay for the information and charts you give them."

Rabat remained silent as Magno and Buzam stepped forward and revealed themselves to the Spartan and the trader. And the older woman was the first to speak.

"What sort of information are you talking about John?"

"Who are these clients of Rabat anyway?"

Buzam asked as well. The Spartan then took out a data pad as Cortana arrived and glared at Rabat with intenseâ€¦almost visceral hatredâ€¦totally unlike the normally witty and friendly woman, and that was in itself very much unexpected to the rest of the crew on the Nirvana as they had never seen Cortana this angry before. John then answered the questions given to him both Magno and Buzam.

"I had Cortana access Rabat's data archives while he was here to get all I could about him. She found that this guy sells worthless junk and faulty parts whenever he lands on other worlds. And like I said he gets all the credits he can from those people to line his own pocketsâ€¦but the real money he gets is from selling those planets and their people outâ€¦to the Harvesters. This gutless parasite of a trader is also a mercenary spy working for the very same aliens who are harvesting human worlds Captainâ€¦and no doubt you've been gathering data on this ship and the crew as wellâ€¦so you can sell them to the Harvesters for the highest bidder."

The reaction of the crew was a mix of utter shock, horror, and outrage that this man before them would willingly work out a deal with the ruthless and inhuman Harvesters, resulting in worlds being harvested and he did it all just for money. The room was now filled with the emotions of anger as all of the crew looked at Rabat with intense hatred and disgustâ€¦several members of the Fire Teams and the Security Teams wasted no time and aimed either Laser Rings or Laser Rifles at Rabat, while Jura took out her sword, Barnette took out her Glock 9, Meia aimed her laser ring and Buzam took out her whip as the pirates all were itching to execute Rabat for this genocidal treachery.

Magno read the data and found the information to be totally authentic and she knew that since Cortana was truly loyal to humanity and the same could be said for John, there was no reason for either of them to lie about this. Her gaze hardened like cold, solid steel on Rabat as she put the data -pad down.

"You've worn out you're welcome here Rabatâ€¦before you get yourself disintegrated here and now, you had better leave."

Rabat tried to come up with a defense but saw that the jig was up and he would be killed, but before that was going to happen, he was going to make the man before him pay, and without his battle-suit, it would be easier before he escaped to his ship since he had more than enough tricks on how to escape. He reached for a flash grenade that he had in his pouchâ€¦but he couldn't be prepared for what was about to happen.

The Spartan rushed Rabat at high speed and grabbed Rabat's arm as he reached for the grenade and he launched out a powerful punch to Rabat's stomach, and followed with a kick to the side and a punch to the side of the faceâ€¦and all three attacks were at the span of a tenth of a second. Rabat was then tossed by the Spartan and he flew into the airâ€¦and slammed hard into several containers with a loud smashâ€¦and the sound of flesh hitting metal was heard as Rabat hit the wall as well.

Seeing how fast the Spartan could move and attack at such a short frame of time made the pirates gap in awe and shock as the Master Chief didn't even flinch or show any exertion, it was as if the whole attack was effortlessly done by a machine. The Spartan then slowly made his way to where Rabat had landed as Rabat struggled to get to his feet.

Rabat spat out a gout of blood hard as he tried to breath, but he felt like he had been hit by a massive wrecking hammer three times. As he tried to breath, he felt his lungs spasm and his ribs move in a very unsightly way, plus he felt as if he had been run over as his

organs made a symphony of pain that he never heard of before, along with his spine as if it had been broken in half. He felt something in his mouth and spat out another large gout of blood and this time it had four of his molars in it and his jaw felt like they had been hit with a shot-gun at point blank range. His entire body felt like it was going to break in halfâ€|and all from just three attacks!!!!

Rabat managed to get himself to his feet, but he slipped and barely evaded a punch coming his way from the Spartan and heard the sound of steel being bent hard over him since the containers he had smashed into were near a wall when he looked to the wall and his eyes widened as he saw a deep impression of a fist in the wallâ€|nearly two to three inches deep in the steel and he looked to find the fist belonging to the Spartanâ€|and what was even more terrifying was the fact that despite having a cut on the hand and some blood on that hand of hisâ€|the man wasn't even showing any discomfort or pain in the leastâ€|the con artist and Harvester spy could see no emotion on the guy's face, nothingâ€|he was totally emotionless, and not a single flicker of pain was on his faceâ€|like a machine. A machine in human formâ€|

He didn't need to know that the blow was right where his head had beenâ€|if the fist had indeed connected to himâ€|it would have splattered his head like a rotten melon being crushed by a sledge hammer at high speedâ€|and that made him even more terrified of the man before him

( MY GODâ€|.WHAT THE HELL IS THIS GUY?!?!?!?)

John-117 looked at Rabat as he pulled his fist backâ€|the pain he had barely phased him as he had felt far worse than this little gash and due to his bones being grafted by advanced ceramics and his nerves being altered, there was nothing wrong with his armâ€|he didn't care about the bleeding as he looked at Rabat with the same emotionless, calm, and deadly stare, but with a slight hint of contempt. He then grabbed Rabat's tunic and lifted the man as if he was nothing more than a feather pillowâ€|and slammed him into the wall once more.

Unknown to Rabat, the Spartan used only his weakest attacks, but there were those who had seen the videos of his tests and knew that even the Spartan's weakest attacks could already send any normal man into the ICU of a hospital for months or even years of recovery, and for Rabat to get only the weakest attacks meant that the Spartan was giving him a very fair warningâ€|as warnings go.

John-117 then spoke in the same cold and emotionless tone to the man he had in his grip.

"You have fifteen seconds to get off this ship and never come back traitorâ€|because if you come back, if you dare show you're face on the Nirvana, and try to charm or harm it's crewâ€|"

The Spartan moved like lightning and then gripped Rabat by the throat with his slightly bleeding hand and nearly choked the traderâ€|Rabat felt as if his throat was in a vise as the Spartan's grip was powerful enough to crush bone and bend steel like it was soft waxâ€|The Spartan then spoke in the same cold and emotionless tone and gave the trader a very icy and serious threatâ€|or a

promise.

"I'll kill you."

With that, the Spartan dropped Rabat, who managed to get his breath back and looked at the Spartan who still retained his icy cold visage and showed that even without his weapons and armorâ€|taking this guy head on was an open invitation to a slow and extremely painful execution. The Spartan then added another threat that made it very clear to Rabat that he was not lying if he said he would kill him.

"And if you and I meet againâ€|you're a dead man."

It was then that Utan appeared, while chasing Pyoro who managed to make his way free of the female orangutan. The female creature then spotted Rabat in his bloody and battered state and rushed to his aid and with her helpâ€|he got to his feet, and as he made his way to the ship he gave on last look at Hibiki who was also being supported by Dita who glared back at him defiantly. The trader looked back at the Spartan and vowed silently to have his revenge on the Spartan no matter what.

-----

Laterâ€|

The Nirvana was moving along slowly after a few hours. Parfet was happy that Cortana had found out that the parts were false and she was able to remove them before they caused damage to the Nirvana, but the work took a long time and Rabat had been able to escape. The Spartan told the captain to let Rabat leave for nowâ€|as Cortana had copied Rabat's ship's transponder codes and she could be able to keep track of him no matter what. They had other matters to deal with than chasing him about, and the Spartan made it clear that he was going to keep his promise to kill Rabat if he ever saw him again.

Hibiki winched as he was being treated by Duero of his injuries from his fight with Rabat, but the Tarak teen sucked it up as the Spartan entered the room wearing his Mjolnir Mark VI, along with Dita and Cortana. The teen looked at his commanding officer and mentor and smiled a bit.

"Hello Chief."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay, all things considered, Duero said my wounds will heal soon so I'll be back and about in a few days."

Cortana smiled at that.

"You did real good out there Hibiki, even if Rabat was stronger and had an edge you gave him a good piece of you're mindâ€|plus you're helping of Dita from that situation was very brave."

Hibiki didn't know what to say at first, being praised by a woman was unheard of on Tarak, but he felt thankful that Cortana was giving him her sincere thanks as he knew that Cortana would not lie about those words in the least. He scratched his head a bit and gave a slight

cheeky smile at the group.

"Aw it was nothing."

Dita smiled and walked forward hesitantly and twiddled her fingers a bit as she blushed. She never felt this way before, when she saw Hibiki shield her from Rabat despite the risk of him being injured more, and it made her feel something more for her Mr. Alien. She gulped and spoke to Hibiki.

"Th-Thank you forâ€|thank you for saving me Mr. Alienâ€|I'm really sorry you got hurtâ€|"

Hibiki shook his head and replied.

"Don't worry, I'll be up and about soon enoughâ€|though I'll need to be in bed for a bit."

"Then I can take care of you!"

"Huh?"

"I'll bring you food and keep you company until you're better Mr. Alien, I want to help you get better so you can beat those bad aliens!"

With that, Dita hugged Hibiki, but gently as well and that made Hibiki blush bright red for some reasonâ€|all the while, Cortana and John looked onâ€|with the former Ai smiling warmly while the Spartan merely looked onâ€|his face hidden by his helmet and visor.

-----

In another part of spaceâ€|

"THAT BASTARD, THAT WITCH, AND THAT BRAT WILL PAY FOR THIS!!!!"

Rabat swore as he his medical scanners finished their work and told him the extent of his injuries. The injuries from the brat were somewhat painful, some bleeding in the inner mouth and a bleeding nose, he was not happy that he got these injuries from a brat who was smaller than himâ€|but the Spartan's attacks were the worst he had so far. He had seven broken ribs that thankfully not pierced his organsâ€|he had some internal bleeding in the liver and his intestines were also cut, his stomach was badly injured. He had lost some teeth and there were several fractures on his jaw and cheeks from the punch to the face. And the amounts of money he had would not be enough to totally heal those injuries.

To add further insult to injury, Cortana had purged his data archives of information, leaving him with no data to send to his clients, and his accounts were purged cleanâ€|leaving him with only change and small bits. This really got him pissed as Cortana had also taken the liberty of dumping all his worthwhile cargo of goods while he was not looking, leaving him with scraps to bargain withâ€|essentially he was now poorer than a mouse.

He growled as he took out a medical kit and applied some pain-killers



to dull his wounds, but he had to be careful not to aggravate his injuries further. And as he began to patch himself up he recalled that there was one good thing about the whole mess as he reached for a small piece of clothâ€|that had blood on itâ€|but not his.

He had been able to use a small absorbent cloth to take some of the blood from the cut on the Spartan's arm, it was not much, but it would prove useful in the coming futureâ€|for nowâ€|he had to rest and recover as he made his way towards another path away from the Nirvana as he placed the cloth in a suspension tank to preserve it and the blood as well.

For nowâ€|it was score one for the good guysâ€|but soon, the wheels of fortune will be in his favor and that of his clients.

-----

To be continuedâ€|

-----

#### Author's Notes:

This is the end of this chapter and as you can see, Rabat should consider himself lucky that John allowed him to leave alive, but not before giving him a dire threat and promise. And Cortana certainly rubbed coarse salt on the wounds by dumping all of Rabat's cargo and stripping him of his remaining funds.

The reason that Rabat is still around is that he still has a part to play in the storyâ€| so killing him now would have been a mistake this early outâ€|but trust me when I say that Rabat is NOT going to get out scot-free just yet and he is going to have his punishment coming to him soon enough. But here's a good questionâ€|

What does Rabat plan to do with the blood sample of the Spartan when he gives it to the Harvesters?

We'll just have to wait now won't we?

On the next chapter is yet another filler where the Nirvana once more sends it's Fire Teams on another mission and this time it's going to be one hell of a fire fight as they will now be helping the people of a planet under siege from the Harvestersâ€|and the action is about to go up a notch!

#### Trailer:

-----

The soldiers on the ground and in the ruined city were stunned out of their minds as they saw the Spartan do what they thought was impossibleâ€|especially given the weapon he was wielding. They had heard they were going to get some back-up. They certainly were not expecting their back-up to be an all female ground strike team with one giant of a man in green and black armor.

"DID YOU SEE THAT?!"

"MY GOD!!!!"

"THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!!!!"

"HOW DID HE DO THAT?!?!?!? THAT WAS FREAKING AWESOME!!!!"

The Spartan paid little attention to the comments and stares as he hefted the Gravity Hammer and watched as the Harvester forces were thrown once more into chaos and all from one hammer swing.

-----

See you on Chapter 11 "Rescue attempt."

## 12. Chapter 12

VanDread "Halo

Disclaimer: I don't own anything that is connected to VanDread or to Halo but I love the both of them.

### Chapter 11

#### Rescue attempt

( ): Thoughts

--

In space

The Nirvana was currently undergoing routine systems maintenance as the ship was docked near a large number of free floating asteroids. Parfet and her engineering teams were busy working on the inside of the Nirvana, fixing all the key systems and doing checks on the circuits, wires, connectors, and systems all over the ship. The rest of the crew were busy with their own matters.

Cortana was busy running a diagnostic check on all the weapon systems on the Nirvana to make sure that they were at full operational readiness for any possible encounter while she was in her personal holo-tank and in the bridge of the Nirvana, as she did so, she reported the weapon status to Magno who listened attentively.

Bart was currently in the Navigation Well, under orders to practice with the controls of the Nirvana to perfect his skills at maneuvering the Nirvana both in tight situations and in combat situations as well. The blonde Navigator was still not happy with the way he was treated by the others, but tried not to complain about it too loudly lest he drew more attention on himself.

Buzam was there as well and was busy checking the incoming information from the Clarion Spy Drones that the former UNSC AI had released ahead of the ship to keep track of any possible activity while they were busy making the routine repairs and maintenance to the ship. Amarone, Belvedere, Celtic, and Ezra were doing their duties as well, though the three had to work hard since Ezra's pregnancy was making her unable to accomplish every duty she had like

she used to. But they didn't mind, they knew that with her baby growing as it was, the gentle bridge officer would be like this.

The Dread pilots were busy taking turns in the Dreads on a routine practice run with meia looking at them through the scanners of her own Dread, after that near disaster in the asteroid belt, the Dread pilots had to practice their maneuvers on how to deal with a similar situation like that one on the off chance it happened again.

Hibiki was also getting a crash course in it as he was being run through it by the Master Chief, who was currently in a Longsword-fighter to observe his student's live fire progress. While he did well enough, the Spartan was not going to let the knowledge he had gained in the fight to be dulled just because they were no longer in the same situation as before. As Hibiki maneuvered his Vanguard through the asteroids, the Longsword fighter would follow his progress and the Master Chief would make observations.

The Fire Teams were currently off duty and were taking a break with the other members of the Nirvana's crew, and they were enjoying it immensely as they ate, drank, and relaxed somewhat as they recounted to their fellow team-mates the battles they had been in ever since joining the Fire Teams, the one topic that they never got tired of was their first ground mission. Though the videos were seen by the other pirates after it was over for a few weeks, the videos were not able to make up for the personal views of the people who were down there.

--

"You actually got hit by a plasma bolt to the head?!"

"Yeahâ€¦thank the Goddess my helmet held off the damage long enough for me to get it offâ€¦after that battle, and knowing I was still aliveâ€¦. I swear never to think about those helmets as ugly ever again!"

"How was it driving a Warthog?"

"Let me put it this wayâ€¦the name might be ugly, but the ride is great! You might want to get used to the sound of either the M41 going off or the Gauss Cannon boomingâ€¦but to meâ€¦it's awesome."

"Don't you get tired of smelling all that gunpowder?"

"You get used to it, and I don't exactly have time to worry about the smell when plasma bolts and worse are flying all over the place."

"How strict is the Master Chief?"

"The Chief? Oh yeah, he's strict and he's not above being toughâ€¦but he's fair, and he's really got what it takes to be the commander. You do all right, he teaches you how to improve your skillsâ€¦you try to make it hard for him to teach youâ€¦and he gets even harder at you, you can't be fairer than that."

The stories were varied and the women in the Fire teams admitted that they were lucky that the skills taught to them by the Chief saved

their lives, if he wasn't their commander, who knew what would have happened to them in that mission if they were not trained the way they were now.

The crew members of the Nirvana were not taking any chances as while the Dread pilots were practicing, they were ready to deactivate the restraints on their weapons systems and go online for a fight on the off chance they get attacked by the Harvesters. Hibiki himself was also alert, while the Master Chief was ready to fight his way through the enemy. Cortana herself was ready to give the Harvesters a full twenty-one gun salute complete with live rounds and missiles on the off chance they showed up once more.

For now, the crew did their best to get everything done before they left the asteroid field they were using. Master Chief however had an idea as he decided to do a scan of the asteroids and found a large number of them had a good amount of metals, minerals, and frozen water through the scanners of his Longsword Fighter. With that in mind, he contacted the bridge.

"Master Chief to the bridge."

--

"Go ahead Chief."

Magno said as she and the bridge crew listened into the message from the Spartan as soon as he was on the view-screen of the ship.

"There appears to be a high concentration of metals, minerals, and frozen water in these asteroids Captain, request permission to have the Engineering team with Vanguards go out and extract as many as we can. The extra supplies might prove useful both as raw materials and if we can we might be able to use them as bargaining chips for spare supplies if we encounter any other human groups willing to trade."

The bridge crew had to admit that the Spartan had a point, the materials they could find could prove helpful for them, and could be useful indeed as trading materials as well. Magno nodded in agreement with the idea as the Spartan raised a very good point.

"All right, I'll have Parfet and her teams begin the process once they're done with the repairs and maintenance of the Nirvana. I'll also have Meia and her fellow Dread pilots act as security detail for the Engineers."

"Roger that Captain, John-117 out."

--

As he finished his communication with the bridge, the Spartan went back to keeping track of his student, as soon as the Tarak teen was done with the first half of the obstacle course that he had set up, the Spartan activated the salvaged Cube Fighters that he was able to have reactivated to test Hibiki's skills.

The Spartan had directed a salvage operation to get any relatively intact Cube Fighters and use them as practice for his student in his actual combat training in the Vanguard, that would serve him well in

order to sharpen his reflexes, and improve his skills in combat when the time came. At first some of the crew wondered why he would give that much effort like he did by salvaging the corpses of the destroyed Harvester Shock Troopersâ€|but it became obvious that his reasons were solid as the Fire teams were placed in situations against their foes and allow them to adapt to changing tactics. The salvaged units had their AI cores purged by Cortana and she rewrote their systems for the exercises.

"All right Hibiki, let's see if you've improved."

"Yes sir!"

With that, the Tarak took out his Vanguard's sword and charged into the mess of Cube Fighters that were heading towards him and engaged them, while his mentor watched his progress in space combat maneuvers.

--

On a planet, the situation was grim as cities were being overrun and defenders were fighting their very best but were being wiped out piecemeal by the attackers, the attackers were unlike anything they had ever seen beforeâ€|it was like they had come out from a horror movie as they marched into the ruins of their cities and the ravaged defenses, supported by a massive number of creatures that seemed be a fusion of machine and flesh as they continued to advanceâ€|the soldiers were trying their best to save as many as they possibly could manage and they were able to do soâ€|but with heavy losses both in the civilian populations and their own forcesâ€|their fighters tried their bestâ€|but they were running out of time.

An aide rushed to one of their commanding officers in one of their command facilitiesâ€|he was tired, haggard, and was reaching the end of his ropeâ€|the same could be said for the rest of the people in the command center and his leader as well.

"Sir! Delta Brigade has been overrun by the enemy forces and they are being slaughtered and we've lost contact with Far Point Cityâ€|and their forcesâ€|theyâ€|"

"They are all deadâ€|I knowâ€|we have no other choiceâ€|what's the report from Space Command?"

"Nothing sirâ€|we've lost contact with them and we have not been able to re-establish contact for the past three to four hoursâ€|but we are assured that they were able to send out a distress call."

"Then let us hope that we get helpâ€|what about the other cities?"

"All have been lost sirâ€|we've had sporadic reports of survivorsâ€|but now, nothingâ€|they are all goneâ€|we have to move out sirâ€|Galand will not hold on much longerâ€|."

"Than that means that we must evacuate to the city of New Dawnâ€|we have to hope that we can hold out that longâ€|give the order for full evacuation nowâ€|all forces and civilians are to evacuate and clear out of the city before we are over-run!"

"Yes sir!"

The elderly leader turned as the people in the facility followed his orders as they began to gather weapons, supplies, materials, information and more—he only hoped that they would be able to make it out in time.

As their forces began to move out of the area, they watched as their city was being torn to shreds by the invaders and that made them angry and very much in despair and rage—but they all knew that despite their feelings of the situation, they had to evacuate. The commander looked on as the towers and buildings of the once lush city were torn down in screams of metal, stone, plastic, alloys and more—accompanied by the screams of the wounded and the dying.

He hated having to abandon them to their bloody fates—but they didn't have the numbers and fire-power to fight back and rescue them all—and it made him even more angry at these alien invaders who attacked their world without warning and decimated their space forces and then began to land into their worlds without any reason and began to attack their worlds and indiscriminately kill and capture their citizens and even their soldiers and military personnel—they cared little for age or gender—they took everyone—

He turned and got into the magnetic rail train that was still intact and he and the survivors of his people, both civilian and military, and whatever they could salvage and take with them to the largest city on their world, their capital and their most treasured home—and from the looks of things—their last stand.

--

The Nirvana crew were now getting ready to move on and make the needed trip back to Tarak and Megele, while the Master Chief and Hibiki were reviewing footage from the cameras of the Longsword Fighter that recorded Hibiki's performance in the Vanguard and the Spartan began to point out the flaws of his combat style and what he needed to work on when the next battle came to them all. It wasn't limited to just the Vanguard itself however and the Spartan even had video clips of the VanDreads that Hibiki made with Dita and Meia, and pointed out the tactical and strategic strengths and weaknesses of the two VanDread forms and how to fix them when they were in combat once more.

Hibiki took the lessons in stride and took the time to listen and record them in his own PDA, that he had been given by the Master Chief to record his lessons and training. The Tarak youth had changed from being the hard headed, brash, and arrogant young man to a highly trained, dedicated, patient, calm, and skilled Vanguard pilot who was winning the respect of the rest of the crew—just as his own mentor was winning the respect, admiration and trust of the crew—and while there were still those who didn't openly trust him like Barnette, she admitted that there was no doubt about his battle skills and attacking the Spartan in any fashion was a bad idea. The Fire teams also changed—from women who were against their commander, to women who were now trusting and respectful of their commander, and would not hesitate to defend their commander with their own words, actions, and lives as well.

Magno herself had taken the time to see the training exercises that

the Master Chief had placed on his women and his way to training them well in battle field tactics and more, along with their mock missions in ship defense and she admitted that the women under his command could very well give the best Megele commandos a serious challenge and were no doubt in par with the men's forces as well.

The elderly captain had to only look at not just Fire Teams to show the ability of the Master Chief as a leader, but on Hibiki as well. When the Master Chief assigned Hibiki to work with Gascogne in the Register along with Cortana when it was his time to be in the Registerâ€|the boy didn't complain but instead became friendly and hard working as the Spartan had allowed him to mature enough for him to begin to lose his planet's teachings about women and see them differently.

Dita's relationship with the Spartan was purely friendly as she was so focused on Hibiki and despite being obviously uncomfortable with playing the role of relationship advisor to his charge the Spartan did his best to make things smoother between the two and after Hibiki had helped Dita from Rabatâ€|the two had gotten even closer to one another. And so did Cortana as well as Cortana treated Hibiki like a little brother of sorts as they would work together in the Register. And Cortana herself was a good aide to the ship as both a weapons specialist for the Nirvana, advisor to the ground forces and support leader, and also as a friendly person to talk to for the women to learn about menâ€|and that was true since Dita was always asking Cortana for advice on how to approach Hibiki.

The other women were also treating the Spartan differently as well. Meia was more courteous, understanding, and patient with the Spartan and amazingly enough took CQC lessons from him to further improve and refine her skills, she went as far as to ask the Spartan to teach her how to use some of the UNSC and Covenant weapons he had with himâ€|and he admitted that Meia showed skills with both the M7 Caseless Submachine Gun and the Plasma Pistol as well. She had taken a slight liking to the Covenant weapon and The Spartan knew full well the abilities of the Plasma Pistolâ€|and how effective it could be in the right hands and against the right foe.

The Plasma Pistol when used properly could disable vehicles by the plasma bolt and though only for a few secondsâ€|was lethal in the right situationâ€|plus the ability to overpower shield systems was considered a great addition to an already unique weapon.

Jura herself began to show an interest in the Spartan, when he was bare of his helmet, or his armor, as the blond woman had to admit that despite the paleness of his skin, he was in a wayâ€|intriguing to her, much to Barnette's slight annoyance. The blonde also wondered why was it seeing the man in clothes and out of his Mjolnir Mark VI seemed so appealing to her, but she didn't complain as she took the time to study the Spartan.

The rest of the crew were also getting used to seeing the Spartan either without his trademark Mjolnir Mark 7 Armor or with it on as they knew that he was a trust worthy person in a fire fightâ€|as he had defended the ship successfully for the past few months to nearly a year.

As things were being dealt with however, things were about to get interesting when the bridge crew called in that they had detected an

incoming data pod that seemed to be emitting a high grade emergency signal.

Magno and the rest of the bridge crew began to track the pod as Hibiki in his Vanguard and a small team of Dreads went out to retrieve it. As soon as they got the pod inside, the engineers from Parfet's team began to do what they can to figure out just where this pod came from and who was the owner.

The Spartan then was now back in his armor as the engineers, along with the other members of the crew sent to uncover the data inside the pod, that included Gascogne and Buzam and as the data was decrypted, the Spartan was now in the bridge to hear just what were the contents of the pod were and show sent them.

--

As they watched the video feed come in, they saw a middle aged woman, who apparently was in the military, judging by her clothes and the fact that she had rank bars on her sleeves and military insignia on her uniform. The woman looked tired and haggard and she seemed to have a look of a soldier who knew that they were not going to make it.

"This will be the first and last you will hear this message. I am Commander Elena Kendrick of the planet Talvern Prime's Orbital Defense Forces. As of two days ago, we were suddenly and violently attacked by unknown alien invaders. Our forward scouting parties began sending us warning message about an unknown force heading at our direction. And then we lost contact with the scouting forces. We tried to raise them, but we were too late. We assembled all of our pilots and scrambled all available fighters to meet this unknown threat. But we were out-matched. All of our ships were engaged in combat with the alien forces and they were overrun, forced to move back. And then we received video feed of the alien forces for the first time."

The images then showed Harvester Shock Troopers making their way into ships and attacking the crew made all clear to the pirates who were attacking these people as they listened in to the rest of the report.

"We're doing our best to hold them off, but they have already broken past our defenses and we are already being hit hard here in Space Commander. The aliens then began to deploy their ground forces and our cities are being overrun as well. We've just received word that our outlying cities are now being claimed by the aliens. And they did horrible things to our people. I have no idea why they attacked us. But I must tell those of you who have found the message to please. For the sake of humanity. Help us. We desperately need you're help. Our people. We need help. We have little time left. The survivors have made moves to escape to our main capital city of New Dawn and only remaining space port in the area. Please. For the sake of all human life. We need."

The recording ended and the bridge crew waited for the orders from the captain. Magno thought over what they should do. The truth was that they were still pirates and had no alliance with anyone. But after all they had been through and seen when fighting the Harvesters, they could not afford to avoid this fight. And they



couldn't just turn their backs on a plea for help eitherâ€|they all knew what fate awaited those people there when the Harvesters were involvedâ€|and it didn't take very long for Magno to come to a decision as data came in.

The elderly Captain turned to Cortana and the Master Chief.

"Cortanaâ€|can you prepare a battle strategy for us when we enter the system? I need to know all the possible tactics we might use in order to help those people."

Cortana saluted as she went into the holo-tank and soon reappeared in her AI form.

"I'm all over it Captain."

The elderly woman then turned to the Spartan who stood ready to take her orders.

"Master Chiefâ€|how soon can you're forces be ready for a ground assignment? We need them all ready to fight as soon as we arrive at the system."

The Spartan did a quick recollection of his trained Fire Teams and knew that while there was no way his platoon could defeat an invasion force..they could be able to buy time for the people on Talvern that could be used for evacuation of their peopleâ€|and his forces were more than enough for that.

"My Fire Teams will be ready as soon as we're in the system Captain."

"Then get them all readyâ€|it seems we're going to be in the fight of our lives."

With that done, the Spartan moved out and then got on the COM to contact all members of his Fire Teams. Magno then gave the order for the Nirvana to make all speed to Talvern as soon as possible, while making plans with Buzamâ€|this was a fight that normally they would have avoided had it not concerned the Harvestersâ€|but not this timeâ€|they were not going to let Talvern suffer the same fate as the other planets that were gutted by the Harvesters before. They were not going to stand aside and let the harvesters do their butchery on these peopleâ€|

Magno nodded mentally that this was a dangerous mission, but her conscience and her humanity would never let her leave these people to die no matter what the riskâ€|they deserved a future, and no oneâ€|especially not the Harvesters had the right to take it from them and treat them like vegetables to be harvested or treated like livestock.

The Spartan wasted little time as he began to call in the rest of the crew of his Fire Teams to get ready for war, he himself went to the UNSC section and began to download the data from the pod they recovered and worked on what this situation presented before him.

The Nirvana changed it's direction and headed for the location of

Talvernâ€|it's crew getting ready to fight.

--

The Nirvana's UNSC sectionâ€|

The Fire Teams were now decked in their UNSC Marine Body Armor which had an improved ablative energy coating to withstand plasma more effectively, developed by both Cortana and Parfet in the Engineering Bay, and they were armed to the teeth with ammunition, weapons, and were more than ready for battle. They all knew that this mission they were about to enter was by far the most hazardous and most dangerous they were all about to get intoâ€|

The Master Chief ordered Cortana to stock up the Albatross with more than double the ammunition supplies and medical gear to help them in this missionâ€|and to further prove that, a flight of Pelicans were also assembled to both ferry in extra supplies and spare vehicles, along with amazingly enough, another Albatross was also ready to hit the dirt the second it was needed. The equipment also included several new pieces of gear as well.

The Spartan then made sure to check in the need for air supportâ€|the Longsword Squadrons that were being piloted by Cortana's AI copies were effective in both space battles and planetary combat, but they were going to need some serious air support to fight an army that sizeâ€|and therefore, Cortana had prepared some new weapons for the Fire Teams to use in this mission

The Fire Teams were not the only ones in the area though as the Dread Squadrons were also there, along with Hibiki who was already dressed up in his body armor. The Nirvana was at least four to six hours away from Talvern and the two forces of the pirates had to work together in order to assure that the operation would be a success. Meia and her squadron leaders, including Jura and Barnette looked as the Fire Teams got their gear together and were now armed with their weapons, armor and equipment.

The gun collecting Dread pilot looked at the weapons with interest as they were very much highly advantaged guns despite not being the same as the Megele laser rifles her people commonly used. She looked at the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifles, the BR 55 HB SR Battle Rifle, the M90 Shotgun, the M7 Caseless Submachine Gun, the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, the M7S Caseless Submachine Gun, the M6G Magnum, the M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher, and the Weapon/Anti Vehicle Model 6 Grindell/Galilean Non-Linear Rifleâ€|or more commonly known as the Spartan Laserâ€|which she had seen in action in the hands of the Spartan. The other weapons were the ones based on the Covenant weaponry, the weapons were the Plasma Rifle, the Plasma Pistol, the Particle Beam Rifle, the Fuel Rod Cannon, and the Needler. The weapons were stored in another set of containers and recharge stations were being loaded into the transports. Those were not the only weapons as Tarak Assault Rifles were also being loaded into the ships, along with Warthogs, Scorpions, and several new vehicles to be usedâ€|for all intents and purposes, though the Fire Teams were only a platoon sized groupâ€|they carried enough supplies and firepower to rival a small army.

The Dread pilots had only seen records of the weapons in action and were not completely convinced that they were effective. However, they

were not going to say that before the Fire Teams as the women looked quite different from before. The Fire Team members were like normal women of Megele when not on dutyâ€|but they became serious and determined once they were called in for a mission by their commander and the way they treated both their UNSC weapons and their Covenant weapons.

The Spartan then activated the holo-table and outlined the mission to his teams.

"You all know that we are approaching a planet under siege by the Harvesters, as of right nowâ€|the people of Talvern are under attack by what appears to be a Harvester group hell bent on harvesting the population of that planetâ€|Cortana has sent out the Clarion Spy Drones and they have gathered enough data to tell us that we are going to be facing serious opposition down there."

Cortana appeared and the Master Chief allowed his life long partner and friend to show the data before the Fire Teams and the Dread pilots. The images showed the planet that they were soon to be arriving at in a matter of hours.

There were several large circles that indicated cities and the deep red dots indicated hostile forcesâ€|who were naturally the Harvesters and there were hundreds of themâ€|along with small collections of larger red dots. The cities were already being overrunâ€|except for one massive city that was located a good distance from the massive wave of Harvester signatures. Cortana then gave the groups the information.

"As far as we knowâ€|the Harvesters are in full force over this worldâ€|unlike the occupation and garrison force that we had to fight before on the previous ground mission, this is a harvesting force and that will mean that they will be in much larger numbers and will no doubt be in different forms once we engage themâ€|this is not a simple demolition mission, we will no doubt be dealing with a force that could be a small army."

The women looked at one another and talked among themselves and Hilda was the one to speak out to both the Spartan and Cortana.

"Sirâ€|I know that we have to help those people and I and my Fire Team are ready to follow you're ordersâ€|but we're only a platoon of troopsâ€|how can we defeat an entire army?"

"We're not going to defeat themâ€|merely delay them until the Talvernian people can evacuate from their worldâ€|the city we are going to happens to be their capital city at the moment, and it's the only city that still has a functional star-portâ€|and ships to help with the evacuation. We will be using some new weapons and vehicles to buy them and ourselves time to leave the planetâ€|our operation window is at least half a day before the Harvesters come in full force on that last city. We need to set up a powerful enough defensive perimeter to ensure that their ships don't get shot down by the ground forces. Meia will fill in the details from here on the space operations."

Meia nodded and showed the planet of Talvern and began to point to the massive clouds of alien fighters that were soon to arrive.

"The Dreads, with the support of the Longswords under Cortana's control will provide support for the ground teams to land and we will also provide security to destroy the Harvesters and clear a path for the retreating ships belonging to the Talvernians, once they have cleared the planet's space sector of the Harvestersâ€¦we will escort them out of the planet along with the ground teams. The VanDreads will form the first strike to distract the Harvesters while the ground teams handle the land operations."

The Master Chief then directed his attention to the rest of his Fire Teams, he can understand that some of them were still not sure why they were going to do this, facing an army of an unknown size and composition, and they were naturally only a platoon, barely enough to hold off even a regiment, but he knew that it had to be doneâ€¦these people were under siege and needed aid.

"I know many of you are wondering why we are going to go down there and face the Harvesters who at this point are more numerous than we are and for people none of you know nor are you loyal to, being piratesâ€¦there is an old saying that I know that fits the situation."

"What's that sir?" Sheena asked.

"The only thing necessary for evil to winâ€¦is for good people to do nothing."

The Fire Teams were silent and even more so were the Dread pilots and Hibiki as wellâ€¦even Barnette was silent as they all heard that. John-117 then spoke once more.

"We do have a choiceâ€¦we can either go down there and save as many of them as we canâ€¦or we can ignore them and move on. As human beingsâ€¦we can't ever do thatâ€¦for if we doâ€¦we subject these people to the horror of being Harvested by the Harvestersâ€¦we will leave every MAN, WOMAN, and CHILD to the butchery of the Harvestersâ€¦and as you no doubt have seenâ€¦the Harvesters will slaughter them all without mercyâ€¦all for their organs, the Harvesters have done it before without any form of mercy or pity and we have already seen their handiwork on other barren planets which were once teeming with life and human civilization, and human lifeâ€¦regardless of genderâ€¦nowâ€¦knowing this and what fate awaits those people on that worldâ€¦can you honestly say to me that you would willingly abandon them to this fate?"

The NCOs looked at one another as each member of the Fire Teams looked at one another as wellâ€¦and they all replied to the question.

"No sir!"

The Spartan nodded and began to point out the mission parameters. The last city was surrounded by a massive ravine in the front and the only way in were several land passes that they had to mine and hold offâ€¦the others were going to be the railway tunnels that were used as fast transportâ€¦the good news was that the railway tunnels were already destroyed, so that would force the Harvester ground forces to go the long wayâ€¦and while the city did have some considerable defensesâ€¦it was already being attacked by small bands of Harvesters who were no doubt probing the defensive capacity of the city. The

city was also under siege by several of the enemy elements as a precursor to their full scale attack.

The Spartan outlined that they would need to delay the Harvesters since the Harvesters would no doubt target the city's power supply, communication center, and naturally their space portâ€|holding the city indefinitely was impractical so they would have to hold them off at the entrances and then move in to protect the first two key areas and then the space portâ€|they would need to set up ambushes to hold off the enemyâ€|he also decided to be the first to get going to the surface via lone Longsword to find them a clear drop-zoneâ€|once the areas of space was clear, he would then coordinate their landing and then set up base command and coordinate with the surviving elements of the Talvern Defense Force.

As the Spartan saw the women get ready for battleâ€|he spotted Dita once more talking to Hibiki who was in his clothes and his body armor, the two seemed better acquainted together, while Jura was still about, the seductive blonde making things a bit more steamy as she and Dita glared at one another. The Spartan gave a slight shake of his head and then spoke to Meia.

"You knowâ€|if you were not so used to flying Dreads and leading them and you were not needed to make a VanDread with Hibiki, I could certainly use your help and skill in flying the fighters we are going to use."

"Really?"

The announcement did indeed catch Meia by surpriseâ€|she was already aware of the Spartan's respect of her skills as a Dread pilotâ€|but here he was now wishing she was part of the strike team he was commanding.

John-117 nodded.

"I doâ€|I've watched you fly in you're Dread both in training missions and combatâ€|and I can say you can fly with the best of the UNSC Navy and Air Force's bestâ€|however I know you're needed here in space so I can't say much about that. Be careful Meia Gisborn and good luck to you."

Meia nodded and replied.

"Same to you Master Chief."

The Spartan then got into one of the Longswords, the very same one that he was going to us to get to the surface ahead of the rest of his forces to set up a forward position and get a lay of the land. The others awaited his order as he powered up the Longsword and got ready to move out.

--

Over Talvernâ€|

The Cube Fighters, Seed Ships, and Space Urchins directed their attention right at the pirates who came out of nowhere and began to attack their forcesâ€|the indication was the blast from VanDread Dita's shoulder cannons that quickly destroyed a small group of Cube

Fighters and severely damaged a pair of Urchin Shipsâ€|bypassing their spines and destroying them as well. The Harvesters were then bombarded by the Dreads and Longswords that came into the area to both distract the enemy and buy the ground teams time.

Cortana and Bart guided the Nirvana in to support the Dread and Longsword Squadrons as the Navigator kept the Nirvana at a good operational distance as Cortana unleashed the 50mm Point Defense Guns and the Archer Missiles. The former UNSC AI coordinated the volley with lethal and efficient precision as Cube Fighters were being turned into scrap by the weapons of the Nirvana. The Dreads also added to the fray by firing their energy weapons and missiles at the groups of Cube Fighters while the Longswords, under Cortana's control with the use of her highly upgraded AI abilities provided support for the Dreads with their own ammunition. The squadrons were needed to also support the strike teams as they would be on their way to the surface and support the Talvern people in helping to evacuate their citizens from their soon to be doomed home planet. It was also when the Longsword piloted by the Master Chief arrived.

Like all the Spartans, the Master Chief was trained on how to use and pilot all manner of UNSC vehiclesâ€|including Longswordsâ€|and while he was more a ground trooper, his skill was enough to use the Longswords. The Spartan fought past several Cube Fighters and made his way to the atmosphereâ€|and soon enough, the Longsword was now through the atmosphere

Magno then was called by Ezra that they now had established communication lines with the people on the ground below them. The monitor activated and the image of a middle aged man with the uniform of a military man appeared.

"This is General Maxwell Grantâ€|who is on this line?"

"This is Magno Vivian of the Megele Pirates and Captain of the Nirvana."

The general's face turned from hope to anger and rage as he replied.

"If you're here to raid us then youâ€|"

"We're not here to raid youâ€|as of right now our space forces are fighting the enemy as we speakâ€|we know ho you are facing and we are here to help."

The General was surprised at this and he quickly turned aside and got confirmation that several groups of unknowns were now attacking and engaging the aliens above their world. He then turned and spoke to Magno.

"I don't know why you're doing thisâ€|but you have my thanksâ€|you said you know these aliens that are attacking my world?"

"Yesâ€|they are the Harvestersâ€|we've already dispatched a scout to go there to you're city and clear us a landing zone for our ground teams to help you defend the city."

"A single scout? No offense, but how can one person face the Harvesters? We're already under siege from some of their raiding

partiesâ€|and we're being routed already."

"Don't worryâ€|he is more than capable of that task."

--

And sure enoughâ€|

The Master Chief saw the battle ground below him as his Longsword came through the atmosphereâ€|he spotted several bands of Harvester Shock Troopers making their way into the city, causing as much damage as they couldâ€|he spotted several transports coming inâ€|no doubt with reinforcements to the raiding parties already in the city. He quickly guided the Longsword to an attack run and contacted Cortanaâ€|the woman in her AI form appeared on Longsword's small holo-tank.

"What is it John?"

"I'm going to land in a few minutesâ€|get control of the Longsword I'm in and guide it down to where I land, I need to clear the landing zone ASAP."

The Master Chief then went to the back of the Longsword as Cortana took command of the fighter and guided it into the battle zone. The Spartan activated the Longsword's hidden weapons locker and equipment storage unitsâ€|he grabbed a good number of grenadesâ€|a SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, with full weapon load and his trusty MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle with full weapon load, a Combat Knifeâ€|and a Falcon Wing.

The Falcon Wing was a less complicated and arguably less dangerous method of orbital insertion into a planet's surface than the HEV, and was actually a well constructed parachute that UNSC troops used in combat when landing in either HEVs or Pelicans was deemed too noisy and attracting too much attention.

The Spartan placed on the pack and double checked it to make sure nothing went amissâ€|with all that done, he activated the override code to the Longsword's rear access wayâ€|and quickly the ramp opened up and the Spartan saw the surface below himâ€|he looked down and got readyâ€|just as Cortana contacted him.

"Be careful Johnâ€|"

"Alwaysâ€|"

With that, the Spartan leaped out of the back of the Longsword and was now in the full of gravityâ€|at least thousands of feet in the airâ€|and as the Spartan made his way down, he scanned the areaâ€|with his Combat Recorders and COM recording his descent to the pirate crews back on the Nirvanaâ€|and the bridge crewâ€|the sight was immense as the Longsword he had just vacated began to drop bombs on the transports as it flew away from the flying blobs of high energy plasma fired at itâ€|some hit the hull, but the fighter was unharmed.

The Spartan looked down and sensed something was wrong and he then deactivated the safety constraints of the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, armed it and clicked off the safety...and in the middle of his descentâ€|began to fire four shotsâ€|while flying towards the

groundâ€|

"What is he doing?!"

Belvedere commented as she saw the Spartan's move via his COM-linkâ€|they were surprised that he was actually taking the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and then firing itâ€|without seeing the targets.

Buzam was a bit surprised but after all she and the senior officers had seen in every mission the Spartan had been inâ€|along with his recordsâ€|they knew that if he did something that was totally outrageousâ€|he had a very good reason to be doing just that.

"Keep you're cool, the Master Chief knows what he is doing."

"But he's still in the air Commanderâ€|and there's no target in sightâ€|what does he expect to hit?"

Cortana grinnedâ€|she knew that there was no doubt something HIT by those rounds fired by the Master Chief, and whoever's down there was about to get some serious back-up from the Master Chief.

--

Down on the groundâ€|

"Where the hell did that come from?!"

One of the Talvern Army soldiers replied as he and his team-mates were in a ditch trying to fight off the alien forces that were moving into their home city, they were engaging several more of the alien forces and more were coming in towards themâ€|they were slowing them down but there were too many coming inâ€|howeverâ€|four of the alien soldiers were suddenly hit right on the heads by what appeared to be bulletsâ€|the four who were hit immediately dropped dead as their life blood began to flow out from the wounds from their heads. The alien forces looked for the shooterâ€|but the aliens had no time to recover as four more of their kin were suddenly cut downâ€|the rounds coming from the unknown weapon tore right into the aliens as four more fell deadâ€|with bullet holesâ€|large ones in their foreheadsâ€|and then an object appeared landed right into the group of aliens.

And the one who asked the question quickly recognized what it was and shouted.

"GRENADE!! HIT THE DIRT!!"

He and his comrades hit the dirt as the grenade exploded in a loud bang and when the dirt stopped falling, they tried to look, but they went back to the ground as the sounds of bullets and explosions filled the airâ€|and after a few momentsâ€|the place was now silent, the group then looked up to see the alien soldiers slaughtered and were littered all over the placeâ€|but while that was a welcome sight since their weapons were already short of power packsâ€|

It was another thing entirely as they saw himâ€|

The manâ€|or if was man was a giantâ€|dwarfing them and resembled the



statues of their national heroes. He dressed what appeared to be a full body suit of green and black armor and was like futuristic warrior come to lifeâ€|they had seen movies and while they enjoyed themâ€|they admitted that there was no way such super-human soldiers were ever realâ€|they were nothing more than creations of directors and actorsâ€|

Now howeverâ€|it seemed that they were going to have to change their minds. They moved out of their ditch and cautiously approach the behemoth of the manâ€|who had a massive sniper rifle on his back and had a Combat Knife as well.

The giant suddenly turned and they all cringed back and aimed their laser rifles at them, and they found themselves looking at the giant's faceâ€|which was hidden by his helmet and they saw their faces looking right back at them through the polarized golden tint visorâ€|it was like looking at yourselfâ€|and looking at an emotionless machine of death in a human formâ€|it was scary as hell.

The leader, a male soldier that was armed with a laser rifle and carrying the rank of Sergeant spoke to the giant of a man.

"Who the heck are you?"

The giant looked him over and then revealed his weaponâ€|a powerful looking Assault Rifle, that action further made the group more uneasy as though they would have fought if the giant did something hostileâ€|but they were not going to try something to a guy who had not just slaughtered the alien forces that were about to massacre themâ€|but who could wipe them out as well.

The giant then spoke.

"United Nations Space Command Navy, Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan John-117 at your service Sergeant..."

"The name's Aleck Brooksâ€|I don't know where you're fromâ€|but you saved the lives of me and my group."

"No problemâ€|I have to set up an LZ for the rest of my ground team Sergeant Brooksâ€|see you aroundâ€|"

With that, the Spartan got ready to move out, but then Sergeant Brooks called out to the Spartan.

"Master Chief, sir!! If you find more of my comrades, then help them out if you canâ€|we need everyone we have to hold these aliens back!"

"Understood."

The group left, but some of the others were still stunned as to where that giant of a man was. The Master Chief had activated his Falcon Wing and made it half way down, but had to ditch the parachute as soon as he was at a good survivable altitude, he tossed the grenade early and it scattered the Harvester Troopers and he was able to use the confusion as he landed and blasted away at them as they were still gathering their wits about them.

His Mjolnir Mark VII activated it's built in medical systems once he landed to deal with the injuries and he was now back into fighting shape as he moved through the rubble and buildingsâ€|dodging the occasional plasma round as the battle was underway.

A Harvester Trooper was in front of him and died in a hail of lead as the Spartan attacked and killed it. He then moved to get cover near a building and then fired another burstâ€|catching yet another Harvester Trooper right in the stomachâ€|ripping the flesh apart. The Spartan then arrived and quickly spotted another squad of Talvernian soldiers under heavy fire from an advancing wall of Harvester Troopers. He took out a plasma grenade and primed itâ€|and with one powerful toss, sent the glowing sphere right into the bunch of Harvester Troopersâ€|and thenâ€|

BOOOOOOMMMMM!!

The smell of ozone and more was in the air as several Harvesters were quickly blown apart by the Plasma grenade when it adhered to the body of the middle Harvester Trooper and blasted the Harvestersâ€|sending parts and bodies flyingâ€|much to the shock to the Talvernian soldiers. They then heard the powerful crack of the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and watched as several Harvester Troopers were gutted in a line by four loud rounds and they directed their attention to the locationâ€|just as the Spartan came with MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle going at full tiltâ€|filling the area with lead and cutting up and unfortunate Harvester Trooper still left alive in the carnage.

The soldiers were stunned, just as they were getting a message from High Command, it was told to them that if they saw a giant of a man in green and black armor with a golden visorâ€|then he was their back-up. They thought that there was no way one man would be enough to stop these aliensâ€|but now they were thinking otherwise.

The Spartan quickly got into combat position and took out the sniper rifle which in the eyes of the Talvern soldiers was more like a cannon than a rifle as the weapon roared as it was fired. Their commander looked at the Spartan and saw the arrival engage several more Harvester Troopers with the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and take down several moreâ€|he wasted no time and rallied his group.

"Come on! Time to take the fight to these alien bastards!!"

"Yeah!!"

The soldiers moved out of their hiding places and quickly moved in to support the Spartan with their own laser rifles as the Spartan used that massive rifle to take down several more of the Harvestersâ€|the Harvester Troopers then realized just who was helping the Talvernian soldiers and began to focus their attention on the Spartan, but the Troopers were too late as they were shreddedâ€|

The Spartan then reloaded his weapons and moved on, the squad of soldiers decided that they had a better chance with the Spartan and followed him after they recharged their weapons and checked their fellow wounded. John-117 normally didn't like too much companyâ€|but this was more than welcome as he moved through the cityâ€|so far the city had suffered minimal damageâ€|but the Spartan knew that it could all change in a matter of time before this city would either be in

fire or ruinsâ€|he had seen it before after all.

The Spartan then scanned the area and then moved on, eliminating any Harvester unit he came across with lethal and quick precision as the squad following him got into contact with any other units in the area and then to high command. It didn't take long for the Spartan to locate a large enough area of the cityâ€|namely one of the massive courtyards.

He contacted Cortana and the AI guided his Longsword down and he then boarded the fighter and reloaded his weapons and got out several spare grenades and then contacted the Nirvana.

"This Spartan II Master Chief John-117 to the Nirvanaâ€|here are coordinates for ground force deployment. We need to set up perimeter ASAP!"

On the Nirvana, the Fire Teams got ready as they were given the location of where they were supposed to landâ€|the area looked large enough for them and was at a good spot for a base camp and defensive position. Cortana powered up the two Albatross Drop ships as the Fire Teams and their NCOs now got their gear ready to move out. The former AI in her AI form was in the lead Albatross' cockpit along with the second Albatross, and as soon as she got the message from the Master Chiefâ€|she took the two Albatross Drop ships off, and was escorted by the number of Pelicans they had for the operation.

As soon as the Dread teams and Hibiki got word that the LZ for the ground strike force was now set up and the strike teams were on their wayâ€|they divided into two groupsâ€|one was dedicated to the attack on the Harvesters to divert as much of their attention away from the landing parties, and the other was to make sure that the landing parties were not intercepted until they reached their objective. The Harvesters figured that out pretty quickly and attempted to strike at the ground forces that were on the moveâ€|but the Dreads and the Longswords beat them to it as they screened the ground teams and ensured that they were safeâ€|

Cortana made double sure by providing heavy fire support with the UNSC arsenals on the Nirvana as the 50mm cannons made their presence known along with the Archer Missiles that came right at the Cube Fighters.

Hibiki was currently cutting down several more Cube Fighters and Dita was right next to his Vanguard and it didn't take too long for them to merge their respective machines with one another. VanDread Dita quickly tore through several more Cube Fighters and then unleashed it's shoulder cannons in one massive blast that destroyed several more of them and severely damaging the rest. Jura was not happy that she was not going to merge with Hibiki once moreâ€|but she had other priorities at the moment as the Albatross and it's Pelicans were her team's concern.

As soon as the Albatross Drop ships and their fellow Pelicans hit the atmosphere, the Longswords took over the escort mission and were now following the Albatross pair and the Pelicansâ€|the strike team were now taking the form of falling meteorites as the heat resistant alloy that protected them began to heat up with the heat from reentry. The Longswords managed to fend off several Cube Fighters that tried to get too close to the strike teams and while two of the escorting

Longswords were destroyedâ€|by both reentry and attack fireâ€|the rest were able to kill the Harvester fighters and they now breached the atmosphereâ€|just in time for the Talvernian Defense Force to get word that reinforcements were well on the way.

As the units of Talvernian soldiers heard from High Command that more of their new allies were on their way, they were cheered at the thought. On the ground the Spartanâ€|freshly armed with spare ammunition and having spare weapons was busy wiping out the survivors with the support of the Talvernian soldiers he managed to rescue. The men and women of TDF were in awe at how skilled this man in combat armor was and he was kicking the aliens like there was no tomorrow.

The Spartan ducked under several fallen building debris as plasma bolts slammed into them and he quickly grabbed his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and one of his newly acquired fragmentation grenades and after firing a few bursts that killed two of the Harvester Troopers, the Spartan did a quick calculation and tossed the grenade to the right side and the flying explosive bounced off a wall and landed right into the Harvester group that was also using the nearby rubble as a shieldâ€|the grenade exploded and the Harvester Troopers were mauled hard by the explosive as the Spartan then spotted several more Talvernian soldiers arrive on the scene and reinforce the perimeterâ€|but some of them were not so lucky as they were now under fire from some of the surviving Harvester Trooper raiders and some were woundedâ€|others were even worse off as they were critically injuredâ€|the good news was that least they had a medic in each group to patch up the wounded.

The Spartan then took out his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and began to lay covering fire, along with eliminating any Harvester Trooper that was out in the openâ€|he was on the move after each shot was fired and then switched to his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle to finish things up with a few well aimed and timed burstsâ€|cutting them down before they can get the drop on the rest of the group.

It didn't take long for the Harvester raiding forces to be wiped out of the map and the Spartan looked up at the sky as he heard the roar of the Longsword enginesâ€|telling him that his back ground teams had just arrivedâ€|and sure enough,..there were the Albatross Drop ships and the Pelicansâ€|all heading for the large open courtyard park before them.

The Talvernian soldiers looked on as the ships began to landâ€|the first were the Albatross Drop ships and much to their surpriseâ€|namely the male soldiers, they were looking at a large number of very attractive women walking into the scene with large numbers of weapons and body armor. Since female UNSC Marines were a common sight among the UNSCâ€|the Megele women were wearing very comfortable Marine Body Armor and therefore felt no discomfort in their suitsâ€|though some of them did decide to customize the armor for themselvesâ€|the women quickly got to work setting things up as they took out the supplies from the Albatross Drop ship that they disembarked from and the supplies included ammunition and weapon canisters, medical supplies and weapon systemsâ€|this included Missile Pods on their adaptable tripods and the AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun which were still unpacked and were loaded on the backs of several modified M831 TT Warthogs, along with those heavy weapons were large numbers of the same weapons the Spartan had with him,

along with others, that the Talvernians saw to be similar to old Earth style weapons, but highly advanced and amazingly enough weapons of a totally alien nature. The women in the Fire Teams didn't waste time to chat as they got their supplies ready as the Pelicans then began to drop off their supplies of extra munitions medical gear, spare weapons, recharge units for the Covenant based weapons, and also spare equipment that Cortana had out loaded to them.

The TDF soldiers looked on as the women, their respective officers and their apparent overall commander were busy kicking things up and as the Nirvana Fire Teams were getting ready to set up their temporary base camp a hover vehicle with markings came on the scene.

The Spartan turned and while the patterns and colors were different, he had enough knowledge to see a military vehicle of a high ranking officer came on the scene. Sure enough he spotted a man dressed in an officer's uniform and had several rank bars on him, along with a side-arm and wearing body armor with the same ranks and he knew that the way the man moved his hands close to his weapon, ready to take it out at a moment's notice, his focused and relaxed stare and the way the men and women of the Talvernian military greeted and treated him he was a high ranking officer. The man looked older than the others and carried himself as a professional soldier. He then looked at the Master Chief and the assembling Megele women who formed the Nirvana Fire Teams and spoke.

"Who among you is the Master Chief?"

The elderly male officer looked with some surprise as the Spartan moved forward and with crisp military precision and experience stood straight and saluted him in a crisp and serious fashion, the officer recovered just as quickly and saluted the Spartan as well John-117 spoke to the elderly officer.

"That would be me sir."

"Good My name's Maxwell Grant General Maxwell Grant son thanks for coming here as soon as you could I take it you're in full command of this all female outfit?"

"Yes sir!"

The men looked at the Spartan with some surprise while looking at the Megele females who had not yet worn their helmets for the operation due to the inbreeding between women of Megele the word ugly certainly didn't exist in their vocabulary so the best of female beauty were all for them to see the women under the Spartan's command however were not paying attention as they did their best to set up the operational command since they had only half a day to get things done. The men wondered just what did it mean to have only one man in command of an all female strike force and ideas were flying about.

General Maxwell then saw the ideas and gave the soldiers a warning glare he could see that the women were serious fighters.

"That's good Master Chief I need you to hold off the enemy for as long as you can until the ships we have on port are fully fueled and

powered upâ€|they were never thought to be used except for occasional trips to the other colonies we had on handâ€|but nowâ€|any wayâ€|we need several hours to prepare the shipsâ€|can you buy us that time."

"We'll do what we can sir."

"That's good enoughâ€|half of the remaining forces will defend the space portâ€|.while the other half will aid the defense of the outer city, along with your forcesâ€|God speed Master Chief."

"The same to you sirâ€|"

General Maxwell then spoke to his officers and the word came that the Spartan was in overall command of the half of the Talvernian Defense Forceâ€|it was natural that some of the officers were uncomfortable with the idea of having a complete stranger in overall command of their forcesâ€|but that was a direct order from their General and they had no choice on the matter.

The Spartan didn't mind at all the addition to his forcesâ€|it just made things easier to deal with for him. He then gave orders to his NCOs to begin setting up defensive perimeters and also to set up ambush sites and sniper positions for both their Anti-infantry weapons and then their Anti-vehicle weapon systemsâ€|the Master Chief then took out some of the new weapons Cortana had been able to make in the manufacturing labsâ€|he knew this weapon would really be worth the work and effort.

The Model 99 Special Application Scoped Rifle or the M99 Stantion Gauss Rifle was a UNSC Army weapon, but was sometimes used in special operations by the UNSC Marine Corpsâ€|the weapon was based on the same weapon system principles that spawned the MAC Guns on UNSC ships and Defense platforms, and also used in the Gauss Cannons used on the M12G1 Light Anti-Armor Vehicle Warthog. Unlike the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle that used high powered Armor Piercing, Fin Stabilized, Discarding Sabot Rounds, the Stantion used high powered electromagnetic coils to fire a 21 caliber/5.4mm tungsten round at extreme kinetic speedsâ€|and due to the fact, this weapon was deadly to the extremeâ€|as it can go through extreme distances reaching 4.5 km without loss of speed and accuracy and kinetic forceâ€|

Before it was phased out at the year 2521, the weapon was normally used as a way to destroy explosive ordnance and light vehicles, but was a deadly anti personnel weapon. The Stantion's unique system allowed the round to rip through several instacrete pylonsâ€|kill it's target by ripping it apart, and blast through more barriers without any loss of speed, power, and accuracy.

It was a powerful and deadly weapon, and used a portable computer for high grade ballistic calculations to engage long range targets. The M99 Stantion can also merge with other battle field weapon systems such as the ARGUS Drone for trajectory and ballistic data.

However, the Nirvana Fire teams only had four of the M99 in their arsenals so the Spartan gave them to the best markswomen in his Fire teams and they were told to set up sniper nests in several roads and buildings, and use both the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, and the Particle Beam Rifle. The other members of the Fire Teams were given the use of the M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher, and the Weapon/Anti

Vehicle Model 6 Grindell/Galilean Non-Linear Rifle/ The Spartan Laser with enough munitions and recharge packs for the weapons.

The rest of the Fire Teams were evenly spread out, and worked well with the TDF soldiers as they took up defensive positions as the remaining members of the Fire Teams helped the Spartan take out the rest of the gear and the vehicles the Scorpions were then positioned in the city in high ways, roads and on some torn open buildings along with several of the LAAV and the LRV variants, to provide good covering fire with the rest of the Fire Teams and the TDF, he then gave out several valuable pieces of equipment for them to use namely the Bubble Shields.

The Bubble Shields were designed as portable shield generators and was capable of resisting a variety of weapons, ranging from bullets to lasers, plasma fire, rockets, and most weapons used by both the UNSC and the Covenant, and could handle a massive amount of damage before it collapsed or ran out of power. However, the Brutes loved using these weapons to secure drop zones and hold positions so salvaging this equipment was valuable this piece of equipment however was far too valuable to lose and he was thankful Cortana was able to mass produce many of them.

It had taken several hours to get everything set up the defensive force in the city along with securing the perimeter around the two key installations to protect along with the space port and the Spartan then gave his NCOs his orders.

"Remember we cannot hope to defeat the Harvesters in an open fight we have to hold them off once they are in the area and by the Talvernians enough time to evacuate their forces once we have engaged the Harvesters I want a fighting retreat action so we can use the city's structure to ambush the Harvesters with the aid of the TDF. Cortana will provide the air support with the Longswords and also we might get support from the Nirvana."

Fiona was confused a bit by that.

"What do you mean by that sir?"

"You'll see"

The Spartan then directed the implementation of the Lotus Anti-Tank mines and packs of other high level demolitions, including amounts of Fougass and C-12 Shaped Charges both in their cube forms and their Damage Pack forms in the city for ambush and also for the land pass entrance into the city. Fougass was basically a barrel that was filled at the bottom with remote detonated grenades and filled with whatever was on hand. The Spartan had the two types placed evenly into the area. The first was the 'fire' Fougass which had napalm in it and the second was the 'shrapnel' Fougass that had spent shell casings in it ensuring that the weapons would really pack quite the surprise for the enemy once remote detonated. Lotus Anti-Tank Mines were deadly motion activated weapons that had enough power to rip apart Scorpions and Covenant vehicles into pieces and was deadly to infantry as well he knew that for certain as he had nearly been subjected to them himself. They also set up large amounts of Thermite-Carbon Cord for ambush surprise for the Harvesters.

He also equipped the Fire Teams with the Asteroidea Anti-Personnel Mines, the weapons had eight arms with pressure triggers and were safe to throw by infantryâ€making it more a grenade than a mine. And last was Antlion Anti Personnel Minesâ€mainly used to kill enemy personnel and were able to be detonated either manually or by proximity fuse.

As soon as those were set upâ€the Spartan quickly took command of one of the newly released Hornets and a small volunteer squad from his Fire teams got onboard with himâ€this was a three member recon team and they had to hurry as they had to see just what sort of opposition they had to contend with.

The three member recon group took off and made their way through the city and past the walls. The city had it's own fort and therefore the TDF had it's military forces on the ready to hold off the enemyâ€but they would have evacuate as well since they could not hold off the Harvesters and their forces for long. The Spartan only hoped that they would buy enough time for the evacuation of all survivors.

They arrived on a ridge area that was a fair distance from the city and the recon team got ready to spot the Harvester planetary invasion force and it didn't take too long for them to be able to spot the incoming forces and they were large in number.

The Spartan took out his still present SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and looked through the scope and contacted the Nirvana.

"This is Master Chief John-117 to the Nirvanaâ€we are sending over visual data of the incoming Harvester forces."

On the bridge of the Nirvanaâ€the bridge crew, including Cortana, Magno, and Buzam were looking at the images and it was time to see just what sort of invasion force the Harvesters had for ground combat operations and this timeâ€they knew that they were not dealing with garrison forces this time.

--

The Spartan and his small recon squad looked and spotted the first wave of Harvester Trooper transports heading their way and they were escorted by a larger number of new Harvester Troopers and several new vehiclesâ€The Spartan looked through the scope of his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle to see just what sort of opposition they were going to have to contend withâ€

There were several of the same Harvester Troopersâ€but that was only due to body design and shapeâ€they appeared not to have either the close combat blade on their left armâ€nor the right arm plasma weaponâ€but instead had two large cannons on their back and they were moving slowly and in rank and fileâ€they appeared to be not suited for close to medium range combatâ€but the Spartan knew better than to rely on looks aloneâ€these units were designed for long range attacksâ€but those cannons were on an angle on their backsâ€so were no doubt not sniper weaponsâ€but mortars. They were moving in a standard wall formation of equal spreadingâ€no doubt to make sure their weapons had maximum impact effect, along with minimizing the risk of accidental firingâ€and since he could see through the scope that they had power packs and magnetic chambers on their backs as wellâ€they were no doubt armed with plasma



rounds.

"What are those things? We've never encountered them beforeâ€|"

One of the members of Hilda's team said as she checked with her own BR 55 HB SR Battle Rifle's Scope. The women also agreed as Cortana spoke to the rest of the recon team via her comm.-link from the Nirvana as she and the rest of the bridge crew were currently looking at the images.

"Judging from the size of those cannons, their angle, and the lack of the normally present weapons in the Harvester Troopers and Shock Troopers we fought withâ€|I'd say those must be their mobile mortar version of soldiersâ€|that must mean they are their form of infantry artillery supportâ€|very cleverâ€|their weapon systems are integrated like all the Harvester units we've faced and since they're armed with mortars onlyâ€|they must be used as light siege weapons in ground assaults. There's no way they'd be used in ship assaultsâ€|those cannons would be too bulky and unwieldy in close combat."

"Then we've got to take them out once we get the chanceâ€|"

The Spartan said nothing as he scanned the rest of the forces that were well on their way to the city of New Dawn in less than three hours from nowâ€|to see just what else the Fire Teams and him were up againstâ€|

There appeared to be Harvester Troopers that were armed with the normal weapons, but there were some that appeared to be armed with larger and more powerful plasma cannons on both their armsâ€|they seemed to be dedicated to all out suppression fire and must be the Harvester Trooper version of the heavy gunner type soldier. Cortana also studied the Harvester bio-mechanical soldier and made the same assumption.

"Those must be their heavy gunner soldiers, they aren't armed with any form of close combat weapon systems and those plasma weapons they have are certainly not the same gradeâ€|it seems they must have an advanced cooling system so they could be used in that configurationâ€|those are serious threats Johnâ€|"

"Tell me about it."

There were other Harvester Trooper types as wellâ€|

There were several of the Harvester Troopers that appeared to have some form of cannon that was not a plasma weapon and the regular close combat blade system on the left armâ€|but the blades appeared to be dullâ€|no edgesâ€|but there seemed to be arcs of lightning coming from the blades. The Master Chief wondered just what those weapons were until he spotted one of the units flush out a surviving Talvernianâ€|the Harvester Trooper fired out a massive blue gout of mist at the Talvernian soldier, forcing the soldier to run from his hiding place gagging and gasping and as soon as he recovered from the gasâ€| he tried to escapeâ€|the lone unit ran up to the human and then used it's bladeâ€|the man was not cut downâ€|but the arcs of lightning that came from the blade enveloped the man and the man fell downâ€|quivering and shakingâ€|he saw the man was alive but was unable to move and he was then retrieved by another type of Harvester Trooperâ€|

This one had the blade system on the left arm but no plasma weapon on the right arm and had in the weapon's place a hand with three fingers and one thumb all made of metal and were covered in sharp metal as the new Harvester unit lifted the apparently stunned human and dragged him off.

Cortana and the bridge crew saw the whole thing through their connections to the Master Chief's HUDS, along with Buzam and Magno and they quickly assessed just what they were seeing.

"Those must be the ones they send out to capture their victims at least the live ones who were not able to fight back the first must used that gas cannon to flush out survivors and that blade of his to stun them the other one must be the retriever type and recovers the victim for the Harvesters."

As the recon team scanned the rest of the infantry, they noted that there seemed to be taller and larger versions of each of the new Harvester soldiers and the Master Chief recalled the one Harvester Trooper he had dealt with before on the first official ground mission the Fire Teams had before and made a guess that the taller and larger versions must be their officers. That meant that the Harvesters were getting a bit more flexible in their operations, now they had their own version of NCOs as he and the Fire Teams did.

Cortana noted that as well and called it in

"Those larger ones must be their officers John if we take them out we might very well be able to break their organization for the time being. But why is it they don't have any of those officers with their Shock Troopers when they attack ships could it be the Seed Ships control them the same way as the Cube Fighters?"

"That might be it that means that the Harvester Ground Forces must have a network of command."

"Right that must explain why they have such a different force for space and ground operations see what else you can locate John."

The Spartan looked on and spotted the very same transports that he and his Fire Teams had dealt before and noted the newer models heading their way one new vehicle resembled an old species of Earth crab the horse shoe crab and it appeared to be moving through anti-gravity systems the unit appeared to be armed with what appeared to be a massive selection of missile launchers that were on it's back no doubt making in a deadly long range artillery system.

There was another that resembled something that resembled an arrow head with some sort of cannon that was on the middle on what appeared to be some sort of turret meaning that it was something of an MBT or Main Battle Tank for the Harvesters. That unit seemed to have several two forward facing plasma weapons that no doubt were used as an anti-infantry platform.

Another vehicle resembled an insectoid walker with four legs and some sort of energy weapon on the front and seemed to resemble a beetle of some sort and judging from the way it moved it was used as a high

speed attack unit despite it's size.

As far as he could seeâ€|this was a well armed forceâ€|but he had no doubt that the Harvesters might have other weapons as well. And he was right as he spotted another massive unitâ€|

The machine resembled a smaller version of the Scarab Walker but was large never the lessâ€|but the machine was certainly different from the Scarab walker he and the UNSC forces had encountered over the years as it resembled a spider type machineâ€|and like all Harvester units had pseudo-organic coverings on it and resembled a grotesque giant spiderâ€|.the machine appeared to be armed with four tentacles in the front and from what the Master Chief and the recon squad saw what appeared to be weapon ports on the tipsâ€|there were other tentacles as well, though smaller and the legs had what appeared to be razor sharp points and edges on the legsâ€|there appeared to be five eyes on the front of the machine and then there was a massive twin pronged cannon like turret on the middle of the machine as wellâ€|and a massive glowing sphere holding what appeared to be highly energized plasma. There also appeared to be openings on the sides of the creature as well

"What the heck is that?!"

One of the women commented as they saw the behemoth making it's way to New Dawn, the women wondered just how in the heck they were going to take such a behemoth down before it got to the cityâ€|thankfully it was at the far rear of the advancing forces and it was taking a bit longer to move as well.

"That looks like a Scarabâ€|or something like it."

--

On the Nirvana, the bridge crew gasped at the sight of the new behemoth under the command of the Harvester Invasion Forceâ€|how in the name of all the Megele Goddesses were they going to stop the thing?!

Cortana looked on as she studied the monstrosity before them.

"That thing resembles the Scarabs John and the UNSC Marines fought with beforeâ€|the Fire Teams going to have their hands full if that things gets close enough to attack them."

Buzam looked on in shock at the machine creature before them and then turned to Cortana.

"Is there any way we can take that thing out before it reaches the city?"

"Yesâ€|I can have the MAC Guns on the Nirvana open fire at the thingâ€|but that will only be as a last resortâ€|the power of a MAC Gun is not to be underestimated. If I fire it at the target and I miss it, the kinetic force of the MAC round hitting the ground will be enough replicate a high yield, long range thermonuclear bomb and it can blast right through the crust of a planetâ€|.I mentioned that before. One is that powerful Commanderâ€|but Firing all three is even worseâ€|and that thing has to stand still for me to get a clear shot at it."

Magno looked grimly at the image as she understood the information.

"Then the Fire Teams and the Master Chief are going to have to get creative in taking that thing out of the picture."

--

Back on Talvernâ€|

One of the recon squad turned to the Master Chief and asked.

"How the heck are we going to take out that thing sir?!"

The Spartan turned and looked his companion and saw her fear and understood itâ€|they had never dealt with anything like this kind of threat back on Megeleâ€|but he didâ€|no matter how tough and massive a unit like this wasâ€|there were always weak points. The Covenant Scarabs were tough and deadlyâ€|but they were NOT invincible. This one Harvester unit had a weaknessâ€|all they had to do was find it.

"We'll take it outâ€|we'll have to head back to the cityâ€|let's go."

The three man team got back on the Hornet and quickly took off back to the city and avoided the enemy forces as the main forward attack elements of the Harvester force was half way to New Dawn and along the wayâ€|the Spartan was already coming up with a plan to finish off this threat. He knew for a fact that there were ways to take those kinds of foes downâ€|but they had other things to deal with at the very moment as he spotted the Harvester forward forces reach the area of New Dawnâ€|

As soon as the Hornet landed in their temporary base camp, he and the rest of the recon squad dispersed as he contacted the rest of the Fire Teams and their Talvern allies and told them what was about to happen. They gulped and a few comments were heard in the COM but they all knew that now was not the time to worry about the details as the Spartan took to the field armed with his trademark MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and his fully loaded SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle. He was on the wall and contacted the Scorpion Tanks to get ready to provide heavy suppression fire at his markâ€|he used the scope of the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle to triangulate the target distance from the Harvester forces and their vehicle support and quickly called in the coordinates to his Scorpion Tank drivers.

Several of the Scorpion Tanks were positioned to take advantage of the height and position as their drivers waited for the command from their commanderâ€|while the rest of their teammates were ready with their own weapons, and those who were on the LRV and LAAV Warthogs also waited for the right moment to attackâ€|they knew that with their forcesâ€|there was no way they could stand an open fight with their enemy so they had to bombard them until the situation got down to close combat.

The Spartan spotted the enemy forces closing in and quickly moved from his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle's scope and took out the binoculars and began to triangulate the coordinates for the most

damage..as soon as he was finished he coordinated the Fire Teams and then he called in the coordinates for the members armed with the Spartan Lasers, M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher, and the AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun. They were then given the combat coordinates and the women quickly got ready to unleash their weapons, along with their comrades armed with the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifles and the Particle Beam Rifles.

As soon as the Harvester forces were in the kill zoneâ€|the Master Chief gave the order to unleash their fire-power.

"All Fire Teamsâ€|fire at will!"

The women heard the order and called it out as the Talvernian soldiers also unleashed their own barrage of laser bolts at the incoming forcesâ€|just as the women of the Nirvana Fire Teams unleashed the fire from their weapons at the Harvesters. The bullets from the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, the energy bolts of the Spartan Laser, the M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher's powerful rockets, and the powerful rounds of the AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun were unleashed on the Harvesters and the weapons of the LAAV and the LRV Warthog, and the Scorpions were unleashed in a massive maelstrom of weapons fire. The women then fired the M88 Stantion Rifles in their arsenals and the Particle Beam Rifles.

The result was explosive in every sense of the word and that was further increased by the use of the Missile Pods on their tripod mountingsâ€|becoming missile mortars that smashed hard into the Harvester ranks. Harvester Troopers of the various makes were caught off guard in the barrageâ€|as they had been sent to clean up the mess and Harvester survivorsâ€|but to suddenly be assaulted by the enemy in this fashion was certainly unexpected of them and the results were there

The Talvernian soldiers also got into the act as their own heavy weapons were brought to bear on the Harvesters as they were now reinforced by their forces. The Talvernians were equipped with a variety of laser weapons and these were brought to bear on the enemy. The result of the unleashed firestorm of weapons fire from the Nirvana Fire Teams and the Talvernian soldiers was obvious as bodies of Harvester troopers were falling over the placeâ€|their magenta colored fuel/blood spilling all over the place along with parts of themselves as they were cut down.

The Spartan got into the act as he used his own SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and cut down several more Harvester Troopers with precise shots to the head and chestâ€|namely where the 'heart' was on the bodies of the Harvester Troopers. The women who were armed with the Spartan Laser, the Missile Pod, and the M41 SSR MAV/AW Rocket Launcher focused on groups of Harvester Troopers and the vehicles that came into sight. The women and their Talvernian allies held their own and fought on as the Harvestersâ€|despite the horrendous casualties they had suffered were not giving up and kept on moving towards them and their defensive lines. The M99 proved to be a devastating weapon system despite it's age as it's rounds sliced through Harvester Troopers and even hit the Harvester Transports dead on with lethal accuracy.

The Harvesters were also getting hit by the weapons of the Scorpions and the Warthogs as Gauss rounds, M41 bullets, and 90 millimeter

tungsten core rounds ripped into their ranks along with the rounds from the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, the M99, and the Particle Beam Rifle. The resulting blood bath was a seriously sickening sight as the Harvester Troopers in the front were cut down by the weapons fire—along with several of them being blown to bits—spilling their blood and bodies all over the place. Several of the Trooper Transports of the Harvesters were also hit hard—One got hit by a Scorpion's cannon round and had half of its upper half shorn off by the round and it exploded all over the place. Another got hot dead center by a Spartan Laser bolt that melted right through the front and through the vehicle's back—the machine halted and exploded out violently all over the place—another was about to release its load of Troopers when it got hit by a Gauss round as the doors opened and the round smashed right into the Troopers and spilled their internal organs and fluids all over the insides of the Transport.

The Harvester Invasion Forces' Main Battle Tanks were also hit hard by the resulting barrage and they were hit hard—one had been hit in the front by an M41 Rocket Round and then by a Gauss round—resulting it being severely damaged and out of the fight. Several more of the Harvester Battle Tanks were hit hard by the ensuing assault and were badly damaged. The Harvester Troopers were being bashed up and crushed by the weapons fire—however, the women knew that soon, the momentum of their initial strike was going to fade and then it was going to be the Harvesters' turn to unleash their counter assault.

As he reloaded another clip into his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, the Master Chief quickly checked up on the Nirvana and the rest of the pirates in space through his COM to Cortana.

"Cortana—what's the situation up there?"

--

Back in space—

The Nirvana unleashed another barrage of Archer Missiles as Cube Fighters tried to engage the pirate ship as it was in orbit over the planet of Talvern. The Dreads and the VanDread were busy taking the fight to the Harvesters and thankfully—they had managed to pull a victory with the support of both the Nirvana and the Longswords under Cortana's command.

"We've gotten more control of the situation up here John—how are things at your end?"

"Not too good—we're badly out gunned at the moment—we've got the one up—but I have no doubt's we'll have to be pulling back from the front lines and into the city soon—"

The Spartan then spoke a moment later—

"Cortana—start your coordinate calculations—for an orbital MAC Cannon strike."

The bridge crew members were stunned at that announcement and so were Magno and Buzam—and for good reason. They knew how deadly the MAC Cannon was when it involved the use of such a weapon on the surface of a planet—and the risks involved with it as well. Magno was the

first to ask about that situation.

"Are you sure about that Master Chief? The risks are highâ€|very high if you make a wrong call."

"I don't mean to use it nowâ€|I have a plan to put an end to that machine out thereâ€|but only as a last resortâ€|we'll hold the line Captainâ€|and we WILL make it backâ€|every last one of usâ€|you HAVE my word."

--

And sure enoughâ€|the battle was about to get very hairyâ€|

The city of New Dawn was hit hard as the Harvesters unleashed a torrent of weapons fire as they closed into the cityâ€|plasma bolts of various sizes and levels of power smashed hard into the city, along with missiles from the Harvester Missile Tanks. The Mortar Troopers were unleashed from the Trooper Transports and then reinforced their fellow units and unleashed powerful mortar barrages from the cannons attached to their backsâ€|the plasma bolts that came from the cannons had a deadly effect as they approached the cityâ€|first moving over the heads of the defenders and then exploding on the descending flight and unleashed more numerous and lethal blobs of highly charged plasma that exploded on contact and burned like napalm all over the placeâ€|the result was an explosive rain that hit the city area and resulting in fires and explosions as well as explosions as the Mortar Troopers maintained their attacks on the city and it's defenders.

The women of the Fire Teams and the Talvernian soldiers ducked and covered as the plasma bolts rained down on themâ€|as missiles from the Harvester Missile Tanks slammed into the city destroying towers. Apartment complexes and other districts with intense and brutal force, along with powerful shots from the Harvester's own version of the Scorpion Tanksâ€|only this vehicle fired a bolt of high density super charged plasma that packed equal explosive force as the Scorpion Tank's own cannon as the shots blew apart the city areas that were in it's target sights.

The Gunner Troopers, the Harvester Troopers who were heavily armed with ranged weapons began to unleash a storm of plasma bolts all over the placeâ€|intent on crushing all the opposition to their masters and the Harvest. They moved as an unending wall of plasma firing biomechanical constructs and this massive barrage forced many of the defenders to take cover as small moving, high velocity plasma bolts were flying all over the place and smashing into the areaâ€|several of the Talvern soldiers were hit by the plasma bolts and had to be evacuated out of the areaâ€|while screaming in pain at the burning sensationâ€|the smell of burning ozone and flesh was getting more uncomfortableâ€|but the women of the Nirvana held on as they knew that getting worked up about the situation would only be an open invitation to being shot at by the enemy.

The Spartan saw the Harvester troopers being to use combat tactics as the Troopers of their various forms began to use the land as cover, along with their ruined vehicles and even the bodies of their own slain comrades. While they didn't move like normal soldiers didâ€|they certainly were able to show their adaptive nature. He knew that things were going to get even more complicated if they didn't

make a strong move soon to counter their foesâ€¦thankfully, their traps were proving to be a serious power to their arsenals in slowing down the Harvesters as the harvesters drew closer and stumbled right into the first outer ring of the traps that he and his Fire Teams had set up.

The Fougass were the first to go as the ones containing napalm exploded and covered the advancing Harvester Troopers with the highly flammable substance and many of the Troopersâ€¦even the ones who were designed for close range were covered and were now being roasted aliveâ€¦the UNSC napalm was made in a way that made it twice as potent than beforeâ€¦and it worked beautifully. The second type of Fougass that was filled with shell casings exploded and while it didn't do too much damage to the more heavily armored vehicles, the explosions of both grenades and shell casings were murder on the Harvester Troopers as the shrapnel tore through them and ripped them apart like thin foilâ€¦their magenta colored fluids were spilled everywhereâ€¦while chunks of their pseudo-organic flesh was sent all over the place.

The attacks however were not going to stop anytime soon and things were getting hairy as the city was being hit harder by the second. Several of the Talvernian soldiers and some of the Fire teams were hit and were woundedâ€¦thankfully there were medics on hand to even it up and patch the woundedâ€¦however the city was quite in flames.

"This is Spartan John-117 to all Fire Teamsâ€¦what is your status?"

"Fire Team Alpha here Master Chief, we've got three wounded and we're pulling back! There's no way we can hold this position! We're moving back to the secondary defensive position!"

"Understoodâ€¦Fire Team Bravo. Report status!"

"Fire team Bravo here Master Chiefâ€¦we're still holding on but three of our Talvern allies are too wounded to keep fightingâ€¦we're giving them medical treatment ASAP."

"Understoodâ€¦Fire Team Charlie, status?"

"This is Fire Team Charlieâ€¦we're moving back to the secondary defensive position to treat the woundedâ€¦we've got two of our own down and five of our Talvern allies!"

"Understoodâ€¦All Fire Teams move to secondary defensive positionsâ€¦remaining Sniper Groups and vehicle operators to provide covering fire for retreating forcers!"

The Master Chief himself vacated the area he was in and placed back his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and used his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle to fight his way through as the first wave of Harvester soldiers made their way into the city. Some of them spotted him and quickly converged on the Spartanâ€¦firing plasma bolts at him, while several of the close combat variants tried to come in and either take him out or collect his organs.

They were not going to have an easy time of it however the Spartan quickly moved in and took out three of them with his Assault



Rifleâ€|the rounds tore through them quickly while their plasma bolts hit the Spartan's Mjolnir Mark VI Shields, bathing the Spartan in golden light.

Several of the close combat units quickly attacked the Spartanâ€|but paid for it as he cut them downâ€|one managed to get close enough and try to stun the Spartanâ€|but the shields held and the Spartan replied by smashing the butt of his Assault Rifle right into the skull of his foeâ€|his increased strength, both natural and Mjolnir Mark VI enhanced shattered the skull and sent the attacker down in a heap. Others were cut down as they converged on the Spartan and he grabbed a plasma grenade and it landed into a group of the Harvester Troopers and exploded.

As soon as the explosion fadedâ€|he dashed in and bashed the heads of some of his attackersâ€|breaking the necks of several Harvester Troopers with his enhanced strength and then firing out several more rounds into the alien forces. As he made his way past several more of the Harvester Troopers, he spotted an incoming number of Trooper Transports and he made his way into the defensive positions that were vacated by the Fire Teams and their allies, there he ducked down and scrounged up some left over clips of ammo for the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, and his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle. He then turned and held the position,â€|taking down several more of the Harvester Troopers, the Spartan moved like lightning as he switched from his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle to snipe the Harvester Troopers as they closed in, and then to his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle when things got to mid range. The Fire Teams turned and spotted their leader and proved covering fire as they had reached their secondary defensive positions and were now in the process of beating the living day lights out of the Harvesters as the enemy forces began to enter and were now being cut down by the outside traps. However he knew for a fact that he couldn't rely on the traps forever as the giant machine that was under the command of the Harvesters was moving in closer to the city. The traps that were set outside were already causing massive damage to the Harvesters as the area near the walls resembled a hellish war-zone as bodies of Harvester Troopers and Harvester Vehicles were all over the place.

As soon as he ran out of ammunition for the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle, he moved back and was able to evade plasma bolts that were flying all over the place and was able to meet up with the rest of the defense team and quickly lent his support and the Talvernian soldiers quickly saw the effects of the presence of the Spartan in the women under his command.

The women were already good soldiers and were led by very talented officers, all trained by the Spartan. But they fought even better with the presence of their commander and it showed as the Spartan calmly directed their defense of the area and cut down even more of the Harvester Troopers even as more of them continued to make their way into the city and cause even more damage.

The Harvesters began to unleash and even greater hailstorm of weapons fire and the city of New Dawn was being given a serious beating as towers and buildings were being set in flames, chunks of their walls and foundations were being blown apart and scattered all over the placeâ€|and the Harvesters had their support provide even more weapons fire to the battle-field. The city was being hit hard as the Fire Teams and the Talvernian Military held the position and kept the

Harvesters from getting closer.

In the space port the civilians and whatever needed supplies and gear were being ferried into the ships that were located in the space port there were a collection of old transport ships, cruisers, freighters, supply ships, battle-ships and more this fleet was supposed to be sent out to increase border patrols but ever since the attacks that had happened and then this invasion force had appeared and the sudden and unexpected attack had grounded the fleet and now they were dedicated to the evacuation of all their people.

Soldiers gathered the supplies as all available hands were on the ships, pilots, technicians, engineers, medics, nurses, and all important personnel were brought in to staff the ship while civilians were brought into whatever spaces they could be housed in while there were a large number of ships the survivors were far more numerous, along with the civilians, there were also military personnel who had to be evacuated as fast as possible and then the ships had to be fueled up and given time to warm up their systems and their engines. The people were still in great fear as the sounds of battle reached the space port and things were getting even more hectic as the Longswords came on the scene and began to lend in air support for the ground teams and the sounds of missiles and bombs along with explosions were everywhere.

The civilians from New Dawn were also on their way to the evacuation centers as they knew that they had to hurry before their city was torn to shreds and they had to move quickly and were now entering the space port's main gates, however not all of them were as lucky one such convoy was suddenly hit by one of the Mortar Trooper's plasma mortar cannon rounds and the vehicle was on a nearby highway and one such truck was sent flying to the side.

The convoy stopped and the military escorts looked at the wreckage as it was now on the top of a ruined building. A young woman rushed out and cried as she tried to reach the ruined vehicle. She was stopped by some of the soldiers and she screamed.

"MY CHILDREN ARE IN THERE!!"

The soldiers however had no choice but to stun her as much as it tore them to leave the survivors behind the Harvesters were already ripping their way into the city and there was no time to send a rescue team however, they decided to send the coordinates of the crash site and hope that someone could get there in time to rescue the survivors if any.

--

The battle grew more intense as the Spartan and the Fire Teams moved back to their secondary defensive positions and they used their traps and their new defensive positions to hold the fort and cut down even more of the invading Harvesters. As the Master Chief moved back he picks up an incoming communiqué from the Talvern High Command and quickly learns of the situation.

He decides to move out and rescue any survivors and orders his NCOs to begin the moving back into the inner sanctum of the city when the Harvesters would be able to break through the defenses. He was

escorted by several Talvernian soldiers and he had to sacrifice his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and take one of the new weapons Cortana had been able to make and that was the Gravity Hammer, this weapon he had used before and this weapon was deadly indeed.

He knew the power of this weapon very well and knew it would come in handy in close quarters combat and as he and his group moved out he spotted a nearby Harvester Missile Tank getting ready to fire a missile salvo at several of his Fire Team members and they were tending to the wounded he wasted no time and quickly placed aside his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and rushed right into the fight with the weapon in hand and as soon as the Spartan reached the top of the rubble with weapon in hand, the Missile Tank fired a pair of missiles right at him.

The Spartan used his enhanced senses and quickly determined the range and speed of the missiles and quickly sent his Gravity Hammer right at the first missile which was at a fair distance from the second and to the utter shock of just about everyone else in the area the Gravity Hammer hit the missile and sent it flying right back at the Harvesters.

The Harvester Troopers who were moving into the city were suddenly blown to bits by the missile that was sent right back at them and the explosion sent several bands of Harvester Troopers to the great beyond while those who were barely surviving were no longer able to function. The women of the Nirvana and the Talvernian soldiers were in awe when they witnessed the event. However that was not all as the Spartan suddenly lashed out with his free hand and literally swatted the other missile aside and sent it into the sky and it exploded harmlessly in the air. The Missile Tank then made the mistake of being near the location of a Lotus Anti-tank mine and the high powered weapon quickly ripped apart the tank along with several Harvester Troopers as well. The people nearby were awed by the sight.

"DID YOU SEE THAT?!"

"HOW THE HELL DID HE DO THAT?!"

"THAT WAS FREAKING AWESOME!!"

The Spartan however didn't waste time as he orders the Fire Teams and their Talvern allies to gather their wounded and move out as there was a lull in the fighting but if there was one thing the Spartan knew from his long years of combat if there was a lull in the fighting something big was about to happen and he wanted to get his team ready for anything. With that in mind, he orders the ones who were manning the M99 Stantion Gauss Rifles to vacate their locations and fall back to their normal weapons of choice.

It didn't take long for him and his small band of allies to reach the area where the fallen transport was and as he closed in the transport was still a mess and he quickly moved in and punched a hole into the side door of the transport and began to rip the wall to shreds further stunning his allies and as he forced the side door open he quickly scanned the room and found that some were still alive in the transport while the others were not so lucky. He then moved in and gently began to free the ones still alive and could be saved by moving away the debris, twisted metal and the dead people

inside. Those who were alive were revived and the Spartan found three young children in the transportâ€|wounded, but unharmed and not fatally injured.

The children were shocked by his appearance and they screamed at him, but the Spartan spoke to calm them.

"Don't worry, I won't hurt youâ€|"

"Where's mama?!"

"Let me get you out and we'll find her."

The children looked at him and seeing as they were aliveâ€|they quickly clung to the Spartan as he gently got them out of the transport and they cried as they saw the battle field where their home was at the moment. The Spartan then checked for any other survivors and after finding none, he gave orders for the Talvern soldiers to escort the wounded.

And it was then that he got a call from Cortana.

"Johnâ€|you had better get ready to move outâ€|that Harvester behemoth is coming inâ€|and from the energy readings I'm picking upâ€|it's going to fire it's main weapon systems!"

And sure enoughâ€|the Harvester behemoth does fire it's weapons as four massive arching beams of high density plasma hit the wallsâ€|cutting through it all and two massive bolts of plasma slam into the city's walls, causing a massive seismic shock of the entire area. As the shockwave hits the city, the Spartan knew that the time had come as he decided to order all the Fire Teams to fall back and get ready to lure the massive behemoth into the city.

It was time to unleash the MAC Guns of the Nirvana on this new terror.

--

As the massive machine made it's way through the walls of the city, the Spartan, his Fire Teamsâ€|and their Talvernian allies held it off with several more ingenious battle tactics suited for urban warfareâ€|as they used their demolition equipment to give the Harvester Heavy Assault Walker a serious head ache as the C-12 explosives and more blew pot holes and sent debris all over itâ€|slowing it's advance into the cityâ€|while the Talvernian military brought their own weapons to bear. The attacks were slowing it downâ€|but the Spartan knew that the best chance they had was to take out the unit from the insideâ€|the machine was too well armored to fire at conventionally and they were running out of timeâ€|they had been able to hold off the main invasion force before this mammoth showed up.

The evacuation was already reaching completion as the first of the Talvern ships began to take offâ€|while the ships were armed and had provided heavy fire support in the skyâ€|they were not meant to stay there as they had to evacuate their peopleâ€|the Talvernian ships were then escorted by the airborne Longsword fightersâ€|half of them made sure to bomb the massive machine that was making it's way into the outer walls of the city in the outer most sector of the city

itselfâ€|

The Fire Teams had to move quickly out of the areaâ€|gathering the wounded and the dying to save themâ€|thankfully, they didn't have any fatalitiesâ€|and their armor, training, experience, weapons, and medical expertise kept losses down. However, they were saddened to have to leave some of their fallen Talvern allies behindâ€|as they couldn't afford to stay in the area for too long or else they would have been caught by the enemy and that would have been worse. They managed to avoid the traps they had placed and lured the Harvesters right to themâ€|they also hid in the ruined buildingsâ€|and rubble and poured it on in a fighting retreat as the battle grew more intenseâ€|the Fire Teams might not have any human fatalitiesâ€|but several of their vehicles were destroyed and had to be abandoned. Several of the Warthogs and the Scorpions was still intact and were pounding hard on the enemy as the city was filled with the bodies of the Harvester Troopers, along with the bodies of those who were among the Talvernian soldiers who aided in the defenseâ€|but the Harvester Trooper bodies were everywhere as the traps placed by the Nirvana Fire Teams proved to be lethal as the Troopers were either cut down by Antlion mines, Lotus anti-tank mines, Asteroidea mines, and more. However, even with this much fire powerâ€|the Fire Teams salvaged what they could and fought on as they retreated, the entire front of the outer city was now in ruins as the Harvesters continued to pour into the cityâ€|

The behemoth crushed through the city as it's height allowed it to move around freely and without hindrance and it crushed all in it's pathâ€|even it's own allies as several Harvester units were crushed by the behemoth's legs and some were even blown apart as it's tentacle like weapon systems began to fire arcing beams into the cityâ€|cutting down buildings left and rightâ€|thankfully the Fire Teams had abandoned the buildings and were no longer in danger from explosions and debris.

The Spartan then gave the full evacuation order to his crew as he managed to intercept a comm.-channel and was told that the last ship was fully loaded and was now taking off.

"This Spartan-117 to all Fire Teamsâ€|begin to evacuate from the planetâ€|I repeat, this is a full evacuation order to all Nirvana Fire Teams, pull back to the Albatross Drop ships and move out to the Nirvana."

The Spartan listened in as the members of his Fire Teams made their own actions and move back to the Albatross Drop ships, they had to abandon some of their vehicles as some were too badly damaged to be of much use to them in battle nowâ€|the Spartan then saw that the Harvester behemoth would be able to fire it's weapons at ships and knew that he had to do something to make sure that neither the Talvernian Ships and his own Albatross ships were not harmedâ€|.at the moment, the Harvester behemoth was firing it's weapons at both the city and the Longsword Fighters that were attacking it.

The Spartan moved out and located a nearby cache of weapons and acquired another spare SRS99D-S2 Am Sniper Rifle with a good amount of clips left and a spare Particle Beam Rifle that still had enough power left in the battery to be of use to him and the rest of the strike team. And most of allâ€|he found at least twelve still intact Damage Packsâ€|all loaded with fresh and potent C-12 Shaped Charges

in them.

With the new munitions in his arsenal, he quickly left behind the Particle Beam Rifle and took the Damage Packs and moved out and entered a building near several cat walks and as soon as he was clear of the building, he moved through the cat walks and then arrived at a road and headed in the direction of the still lumbering behemoth. The Spartan moved at his best speed and avoided the attacks from the Harvester Troopers, the soldiers under the command of the Harvesters tried to kill the Spartan the moment they saw him, but the UNSC super soldier was not someone one easily defeats on the first try as he quickly made his way past them and used his weapons to cut through the opposition. Several Harvester Troopers were gunned down by the Spartan with precise and lethal bursts of bullets from his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and the rest were quickly taken out by a well thrown Plasma Grenade as the Spartan moved on.

As the Harvester attack unit ripped through the city, the Fire Teams had gathered their wounded comrades and the Talvernian soldiers who were their allies in the battle. The people of Talvern were assured that the space above them was now clear and that was true. In deep space, Hibiki and the Dread pilots had been able to clear the space region of Cube Fighters and Seed Ships. Their charred ruins floating all over space as the Talvernian Ships began their ascend into space, and along with them were the two Albatross Drop-ships as well.

Magno quickly orders three Dreads to act as a screening force for the ships while Longswords, the ones which were still in space provided the extra fighter screen protection. The pirates in space kept track of planet side traffic to monitor the situation while the bridge crew tracked the IFF tags of their comrades who to their relief were all in the Albatross Drop-Ships and also as the Spartan fought his way to the enemy's main attack unit as they tracked his progress.

Back on the ground, the Spartan managed to arrive at tall complex with a large walkway tube left over from a plasma storm barrage. The Spartan looked down and saw that the massive machine was already moving right under him and he wasted no time as he leaped downwards.

The Spartan landed with a thump on the top of the back of the Harvester behemoth, his Mjolnir' Mark VI's magnetic boot pads holding him in place and he had no time to waste as he quickly avoided a powerful plasma beam that came at him from the tentacle like arms on the Harvester behemoth's weapon systems. He checked his scanners as they determined that the beam was fifty times stronger than a Hunter's Fuel Rod Cannon, meaning that there was no way his shields could have withstood the shot. Even his armor would have been easily destroyed by the beam and now he had to evade four of them as the tentacles began to unleash several beams at the Spartan which he avoided and quickly got some cover and then spotted that appeared to be some sort of power tube that resembled the vein of some living thing.

He grabbed a Plasma Grenade and used his strength to punch through the plating and then placed the grenade inside. The weapon exploded and that caused some level of discomfort for the behemoth as it began to slow down its attack.

The Spartan saw that he was still some distance away from the main

plasma tank and quickly sprinted forward, moving as fast as he could before the tentacles got a bead on himâ€|however it seemed that the behemoth had halted it's tentacles as it realized that the Spartan was too close to it's plasma battery tank. The Spartan wasted little time and quickly activated the Damage Packs. He then reached the Plasma tank and fired several rounds to the outer shell and then placed the Damage Packs there and leaped awayâ€|landing behind the behemoth as the Damage Packs exploded in a massive storm as the harvester behemoth seemed to unleash a massive roar as it's plasma tank had been given a massive rupture by the Damage Packs.

John-117 looked up and saw that the attack he had worked as the behemoth began to move erratically and seemed badly injured as high powered plasma was leaking out of the massive hole that was on it's abdomen. He wasted no time looking at the monstrosity as he spotted more Harvester Troopers beginning to focus on him. Plasma bolts flew all over the place as he moved away from the sceneâ€|avoiding some falling debris which would have crushed him flat. He knew that considering his distance from the Albatross Drop-shipsâ€|there was no time for him to make it thereâ€|he would have to get to his still landed Longsword Fighter. His attention however was diverted when he picked up an incoming transmission from the TDF.

"We're under heavy attack by the alien Troopersâ€|we have children with usâ€|anyone out thereâ€|."

The Spartan activated his NAV marker system and found the target to be at least three hundred meters from him and quickly made a quick turn and headed thereâ€|his speed was incredible and he spotted several Harvester Troopers attacking a transport and to his surprise, he spotted the same children about to be attacked by a pair of Harvester Troopersâ€|the Talvern soldiers already dead and so were the rest of the Harvester Troopersâ€|he quickly took out his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and fired two successive rounds and took down the Harvester Troopersâ€|they dropped dead before the Spartan and he made his way to the childrenâ€|finding to his relief that they were all alive.

The children however, then screamed and he quickly turned and spotted one of the Harvester Troopers still up and it slashed out with it's blade weapon, the Spartan blocked with the SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle and blocked itâ€|but the weapon was now useless as half the barrel was cut clean with the edge of the blade. The harvester Trooper tried to kill the Spartan, but never got the chance as the Spartan launched a vicious punch that splattered the face and he then stabbed the Harvester Trooper with the weapon's sharpened barrelâ€|with the threat terminatedâ€|

The Spartan knew that time was of the essence as he got the children with him and then activated his NAV marker to locate his Longswordâ€|he was thankful the fighter was still intact from it's signal strength and was where he had left it before. The Spartan slowed his pace to help the children as they made it there, but he was lucky to have found a hover carâ€|no doubt used by the Talvernian peopleâ€|wasting little time the Spartan punched through the windows and opened the doorâ€|and when he looked at the controls, he decided to take a second and then revealed a newly added feature to his Mjolnir Mark VI as a small data cable was released near the right forearm guard.

The Spartan then located a port and locked it in, the Mjolnir Mark VI's systems quickly accessed the schematics and mechanics of the hover car and transferred the data into the HUDs to show the Spartan how to start the car—and without any more problems to worry about, the Spartan quickly maneuvered his way out of the area as more of the city began to fall around him as the Harvesters began to rip the city to shreds.

Apparently the behemoth was not only the main attack weapon of the Harvesters but served as the main command and control node for the entire invasion force—explaining why it was massive, heavily armed, and well armored. However, the Spartan knew that he would have minutes to spar as he quickly arrived at the site where his Longsword was—he opened the door and quickly ushered the children inside. His shield gauge flickered and he quickly turned around and fired several bursts from his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, cutting down two Harvester Troopers and spotted three more heading towards him—namely the close combat types. With a quick head count, the Spartan then tossed his last two Frag Grenades at the incoming troopers and watched as they were torn apart by the explosion of the weapons and he killed the survivors with another blast and he moved back into the Longsword and closed the boarding ramp. The Spartan moved to the cockpit and strapped the children into the crew chairs, he quickly took the Longsword up and it began to take off—several other remote controlled Longswords flew top cover as the Spartan got the fighter to it's high speed, pushing the engines to their limits to escape from the area. He quickly contacted Cortana.

"Cortana! Fire the MAC Guns ASAP!"

--

The command to fire the weapons was implemented and for the first time in the first few months—the MAC Guns of the Nirvana were brought to bear into a battle—the bridge crew and everyone on the ship were shaken a bit as the three MAC Guns fired their rounds. The Dreads and the VanDread Dita moved aside as three massive cores of metal were fired at high speed from the front top section of the Nirvana. The molten slugs of tungsten and depleted uranium streaked towards their target and broke through the atmosphere at hyper speed, glowing blood red due to the heat.

The Longswords, including the one piloted by the Spartan were able to stay away from the path of the weapons—but they were buffeted by the kinetic force of the projectiles. The Ai controlled fighters were damaged and some were destroyed—but the Spartan regained control of his fighter and got it back into control.

Down below—the massive Harvester behemoth was able to recover and then directed it's attention to the sky and tried to lock on but it's attempt to slay the Spartan was defeated as the 600 metric ton tungsten slug from the Nirvana's MAC Cannon ripped right through it's back—literally carving a crater on it's back and it was slammed hard into the ground and was blown to bits as the kinetic force of the weapon was like a nuclear bomb as the round punched through the Harvester behemoth and into the ground—the area around the behemoth exploded as it too was ripped apart by the massive force and pieces of the once mighty Harvester weapon were sent scattering all over the place—the other MAC rounds slammed into the same area and further devastated the battle-field and tore through the invasion force of



the Harvesters into nothing but melted debris and more. The result was a massive dust cloud that reached thousands of feet into the sky and a flash of light was seen from space as the plasma in the behemoth ignitedâ€|bathing the surface in a super heated plasma cloud. And the shockwave reached up to the sky and the bridge crew lost contact with the Spartan.

The crew watched breathlessly for any word of the Spartanâ€|from the Nirvana crew, the Fire Teams, and the Talvernian peopleâ€|seconds passed and thenâ€|when all hope had been thought lostâ€|

"This is Spartan II John-117 to the Nirvanaâ€|we've made itâ€|civilian passengers are alive and accounted for."

A massive cheer filled space as everyone in all the ships roared out their relief and joyâ€|

They had pulled a fast one on the Harvesters, a risky gambit had paid off big time and an entire world's survivors were alive and well.

--

Onboard the Nirvanaâ€|

The pirate crews gathered around the Hanger Bay as the Longsword piloted by the Master Chief came backâ€|along with them were among the Talvernian survivorsâ€|including one very worried mother who was beside herself with fear and griefâ€|hoping that just maybeâ€|her children were alive. The loading ramp of the Longsword opened and the mother was overjoyed as several voices came out.

"MOMMY!!"

Three young childrenâ€|two boys and a girl came running outâ€|none the worse for wearâ€|no injuries as wellâ€|the children were overjoyed to see their mother alive and so was sheâ€|

"JAREN!! MARA!! DAN!!"

Lana rushed up and hugged her children with tears in her eyesâ€|the youngest of them, young Mara was bawling tears as she held her mother. While her two boys hugged her tight and were also crying the other members of the crew looked on and then the Fire Team members cheered as the Master Chief returnedâ€|still carrying his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifleâ€|having sacrificed his SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle to stop the Harvester Trooper from harming the children. He placed his weapon on his back walked over and stood before the re-united family as Cortana walked up to himâ€|the former AI now human female gave a sigh of utter relief as she approached her close friend.

"You really know how to make an escape Johnâ€|thank heaven you made it."

"Thanks Cortana."

Another person came forwardâ€|none other than Maxwell Grant who smiled and saluted the Spartan, along with those who were with him as the General shook hands with the seven foot tall Spartan. He had never thought that his people would have made itâ€|they were

surrounded and out gunnedâ€|but these peopleâ€|these heroes came and saved their livesâ€|and gave them all a fighting chanceâ€|he knew that some of or a good number of his people were not so lucky but they would be avenged somedayâ€|all he had to worry about now was to make sure that his people would find a safe place to hide and recover.

"My people owe you and your fellow pirates our lives Master Chiefâ€|if you hadn't been thereâ€|then I don't even what to know what our fates would have been."

"Not a problem sirâ€|and you have Captain Magno Vivian to thank."

Maxwell turned and saw both Buzam and Magno come up to them and he saluted them as well, to which Magno smiled back, and he spoke to the elderly pirate Captain.

"I don't know how I can thank you Captainâ€|if you and your crew hadn't shown upâ€|our people would have been finished."

"Think nothing of itâ€|the Harvesters are a grave threat and stopping them from inflicting their horrific plans on others was worth every momentâ€|so what do you plan to do now General?"

"We'll be evacuating to another sector of the galaxyâ€|far beyond where the Harvesters' range and maybe rebuildâ€|the ships have more than enough supplies, resources, and equipment for us all to rebuild our lives againâ€|and this timeâ€|if the Harvesters ever show up againâ€|we'll be more than ready for them. And this is where we thank you."

The general then looked to his fellow officers and they nodded as they called out a number of names and sure enough several of their soldiers came forwardâ€|twenty men and twenty womenâ€|all appeared to be well trained soldiers, and they all saluted both the Master Chief, Cortana, Buzam, and Magno. Maxwell looked at the looks of curiosity and gave the answer.

"My officers and I have talked it over with the soldiers before you and they have decided to join you in your missionâ€|they want to work with your Fire Teams and help you in the battle with these alien monsters. They are all highly skilled soldiers and can really be of help to your forcesâ€|I am not saying that they are not capable as I have never seen a far more skilled band of soldiers in my life. They are all volunteers and know what they are getting intoâ€|of courseâ€|this is entirely up to you if you want them in your crew."

The Spartan looked at the assembled volunteers and he saw that the General was not kidding, he saw professional soldiers in the groups before him and while he was not the kind to deny the Talvernian people some of their own soldiers, he couldn't be picky in this kind of situation no matter what and he saluted the General.

"Thank you sir."

The three children then left their mother and all three faced the Master Chief as he looked at them. Dan and Jaren then saluted the Spartan and he saluted them back as the eldest of the siblings

spoke.

"Sir, someday I want to be a soldier, and when I do, can I volunteer to join the Spartans?"

The Master Chief recalled the time one UNSC Marine named Harland asked him the very same question and he knew that giving a full answer was not the best move one could make. He didn't know the fate of the Corporal afterwards, but he had hope that he would have done his duty and had made it.

"You don't volunteer son, you get chosen."

"Oh, but when I'm full grown and a soldier, tell them I'm willing to join the Spartans so I can pay those aliens back for harming my world."

"Me too sir!!"

The Spartan looked at both boys as they walked back to their mother and then the young girl hesitantly walked over to him. He looked at her and he could see that the young girl had something to say to him but she seemed to be very shy about the whole thing, he decided to move to her height as she was only up to his stomach in height. The Spartan then spoke to the young girl.

"You all right?"

"Yes, I want to thank you for saving us, you're a hero."

Without any hesitation, the little girl hugged the Spartan, much to the surprise of just about everyone in the whole hanger. Unsure on how to react to this properly, the Spartan hugged the child back, keeping his enhanced strength under full control.

Paiway looked and grabbed her trusty camera and took a picture.

"PAI CHECK!"

--

Hours later,

The Master Chief checked his chronometer as he walked through the halls of the Forward Unto Dawn section of the Nirvana as the ship was currently on its way back to Tarak and Megele. The men and women recruits from Talvern were given bunks in the UNSC section and they were now part of the Nirvana Fire Teams, giving him more people to train and mold into efficient soldiers for ship defense and ground operations.

The pirates were taking a long, well deserved rest, while the wounded Fire Team members were currently recovering in the Medical Bay of the Nirvana, all wounded but thankfully alive and would recover soon. The Spartan decided to get together a band of combat medics to be assigned to each Fire Team in the later future, should another battle be on his hands that required him and his Fire Teams to go to the ground.

Cortana was happy to see him alive and so were Hibiki and his NCOs,

and the break they had was worth it, the former UNSC AI was currently on the bridge with the weapon systems activeâ€¦keeping ready to fight just in case the Harvesters came back into the battle. The Talvern Fleet had left the area and were now moving away to find a new world to settle on, however, they vowed that someday, they would repay their debt to the pirates.

As he reached the holo-table, the Spartan took out a data crystal chip from his helmet and locked into the data slot in the table and he reviewed the battle footage he had recorded from the ground mission, for many reasons apart from tactical evaluation of the mission and the enemy. The Spartan knew that this battle had taught him that the Harvesters had a formidable militaryâ€¦similar in some way to the Covenant of oldâ€¦but he knew that the aliens he was fighting were not the Covenantâ€¦because when the truth about Halo and the Great Journey came outâ€¦the Covenant was broken and the Elites, and several other races such as the Grunts and the Hunters were allies now of the UNSCâ€¦of humanityâ€¦but the Harvestersâ€¦whoever they were, were not like the Covenant at allâ€¦they had no moral concept of mercyâ€¦their merciless attacks on human worlds was proof of that.

He vowed that he would not let humanity in this universe suffer the same fate of extinction as his didâ€¦no matter what, he would not let the Harvesters win this warâ€¦it was not his war by definitionâ€¦but he would never turn his back on humanityâ€¦everâ€¦so no matter what weapon the Harvesters had with themâ€¦he would fight.

--

To be continuedâ€¦

--

Author's notes:

It's been a long time since I worked on this chapterâ€¦sorry to my readers, but you know how life is at times. But I am happy to finally finish this chapter, though some work could be done to further improve this one.

As requested by some readers, the Harvesters have a now more expanded arsenal of soldiers and vehicles to their force and they are deadlier than the standard troopers and vehicles you've read about so far. There are Missile Artillery Tanks, Main Battle Tanks, Gunner Troopers, Mortar Troopers, CQC Troopers, Officers, and of courseâ€¦their massive command fortress walkerâ€¦which I dubbed the Devastator Walker. This means that on any more ground engagementsâ€¦you can expect that things are really going to get messy for the ground teamsâ€¦they are alive for today and have new members with them and there are now men in the Fire Teams.

Is there any chance ofâ€¦well, relationships? Maybeâ€¦we'll just have to wait and see now won't we? There's kind of a mess with the storyâ€¦but that's kind of expected since I've just gotten back to writing this storyâ€¦we're reaching the soon to come ending of this ficâ€¦but I'll do my best to make it as exciting as I can, so feel free to give comments and ideas to help along okay?

On the next chapterâ€¦we're going swimming to a certain water filled

planet, and a certain blonde is about to get her wishâ€|though whether she likes the results or not is up to her. However, don't think it's going to be all peaceful on the surface once company shows up.

Trailer:

--

Magno and Buzam looked at the incoming units that resembledâ€|boats and were approaching the cityâ€|the officers and their Fire Team escorts knew that things were now going to be rather interesting from here on out.

The Spartan calmly reached for a Spartan Laser as Fanita spoke.

"You can't stop the Munya from doing what must be doneâ€|"

The Spartan turned and Fanita backed away a bit at the Spartan's stare as she saw her face in the golden visor of the eight foot tall super soldier who emotionlessly replied.

"Watch me."

--

See you on the next chapter folks!!

### 13. Chapter 13

VanDread Halo

Disclaimer: Halo belongs to Bungie and VanDread belongs to GONZO, I own neither so don't ask for a lawsuit.

### Chapter 12

Water Hazardâ€|

( ): Thoughts

--

The Nirvana was currently orbiting an entire planet made of water and the bridge crew were looking at it while the officers were looking at the planet while analysis of the planet in question was nearing completion. The pirate officers were currently in the Conference Room and so was John-117 and Cortana.

Since the Spartan was head of Ground Team operations and Ship Defenseâ€|he was naturally an officer within the ship, and Cortana's roles as ship weapons officer, combat intelligence officer, and ground operations support and coordination leader also placed her in an officer's position as well. The Spartan was currently in his Mjolnir Mark VI and was wearing his helmet while Cortana was wearing her normal clothes at the moment.

Buzam was currently giving her reports on the current findings on the planet before them.

"The planet appears to be entirely covered in water and it has a nitrogen-oxygen mix in the atmosphereâ€¦so it is capable of supporting human lifeâ€¦scans also detect two important things, the first is the presence of what appears to be an island city and the remains of a colony ship under water."

Magno looked at her fellow officers and namely Cortana and the Master Chief, the two were also looking at the data and were now doubt coming up with plans of their own for this possible ground or rather water based operation.

"All right thenâ€¦time to see our 'cousins' and see what we can find out from them."

--

In the bridgeâ€¦

"Wowâ€¦that planet is very pretty."

"Yeahâ€¦.looks like a great sapphire from up here."

The bridge crew looked on while giving compliments on the planet's appearance, the Spartan and the rest of the officers were thereâ€¦while Hibiki was also among them, wearing his Body Armor suit, and so was Dita, and Meia.

"Not a bad looking world."

Cortana said as she was currently in her holo-tank. The Spartan however replied in response.

"I liked Reach betterâ€¦not too much water."

The former UNSC AI laughed at that as the others looked at the Spartan with some confusion as to where this planet was. They knew little about the Spartan apart from his military history, battle records, military awards, but not much else. However, before they could ask more questions about what he meant by that remarkâ€¦the threat scanners came online.

Belvedere, Amarone, Ezra and Celtic quickly checked the area and Ezra then gave the report as data came into the systems.

"There appear to be Harvester signals coming from the other side of the planet!"

"How many?"

Buzam asked as she looked at the tactical scanners.

"A large number of Cube Fighters, some Boarding craftâ€¦and what appears to be some sort of massiveâ€¦shipâ€¦.it's unlike anything we have on record."

Sure enoughâ€¦it didn't take long for the crew of the Nirvana to spot the ship as it came into viewâ€¦it was hideousâ€¦it resembled a malevolent looking organic tulip which was closed at the very moment, there seemed to be a number of Cube Fighters on itâ€¦doing something

that resembled repairs of some sort.

"What the devil is that thing?!"

The elderly Captain asked as they gazed at the new monstrosity. Cortana scanned it , using her own sensors as she powered up the Point Defense Guns and the Archer Missile Pods, as she did her scanning she determined that it was not a combat ship but seemed to be built for a far more insidious purpose.

"That ship must some sort of orbital harvesting vessel Captain I can't see any weapon ports so the Cube Fighters and Boarding craft with it must be the security detail."

"Well, if they're here to Harvest the people of this planet then I guess we're going to have to kick them out of this system and send them back empty-handed! All hands to combat stations!"

John-117 then reached a nearby inter-com and spoke.

"This is Spartan-117 to all Fire Teams suit up and prepare for combat!"

All throughout the ship the call to battle was now being played as alarms were sounding all over the ship the Dread pilots got ready to move to their fighters while the Nirvana Fire teams and the Security Teams got ready to defend the Nirvana on the off chance that the Harvesters would board the ship. The newly introduced Talvern recruits were able to fit in with their Megele allies and had received training on the use of the Covenant based weapons used by the Nirvana Fire Teams in their missions, along with the use of UNSC based weapon systems. The Spartan moved to the UNSC section of the Nirvana and arrived at the Armory and grabbed an MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and took out a M90A Shotgun and loaded the weapon with the shells as he waited in the main hall for his Fire Teams and their respective NCOs and their new Talvern allies and got them all ready for combat, the Talvernian soldiers were still equipped with their standard body armor and weapons and were ready to support their fellow Fire Team members as the Spartan began assigning them to areas of the Nirvana that were viable entry points for any Boarding Craft that belonged to the Harvesters. The Spartan checked his own weapons and got ready for the imminent call of Cortana that external and internal contacts were imminent.

Hibiki was now on his way to the Hanger where his partner was, but he was suddenly stopped by Jura and Barnette, the blonde had been able to scout out his route and set up some lights and a video camera and doing things that utterly confused the young Tarak male but he paid them no mind and despite Jura's protests he was in a hurry, but not before shouting at the two.

"We're in the middle of a damn battle! Quit horsing around and get to your Dreads!"

--

As the bridge crew got ready for the soon to come battle Belvedere turned and spoke to the Captain.

"Begging pardon Captain but wouldn't it be better that we have

Cortana use the MAC guns it take out the Harvester ship instead of sending out the Dreads and the Vanguard?"

Magno thought about it and turned to Cortana who was busy scanning the ship.

"Can you use the MAC guns on the Harvester ship Cortana? Belvedere does have a pointâ€|with even just one shot from the MAC guns we haveâ€|that ship could be easily dealt with and we don't have to send out the Dreads."

Cortana turned and shook her head while being in her holo-tank.

"That's bad idea Captainâ€|"

"Why's that?"

"The Harvester ship's close to the barrier between the zero-gravity of deep space and the gravity well of the planet below us Captain. If I was to use the MAC Gun, there's a big chance that the ship might crash into the planet and it could result in a massive earth-quake and tsunami that could hit the city and cause massive casualties on the city below us. We'd end up killing millions of civilians in doing so. Our best chance to win this is to force the Harvesters away from the planet so we can destroy it without any risk to the people below."

Magno looked at the situation and after Buzam did her own analysis and said that Cortana was right in her decision, she decided to that end that destroying the ship while it was there was a bad ideaâ€|they would have to find a way to force the ship away from the planet and allow them to finish it off without risk to the people below on the water filled planet.

"All rightâ€|destroying them right now is a bad idea, considering their location and if that is the risk if we fire the MAC guns on that ship, then we're going to have to force the Harvesters away from this planet. All Dread pilotsâ€|we have to force the Harvesters away from the planet and destroy them when they are away from the planet."

--

Hibiki got ready to face off with the Harvesters as their Cube Fighters as he and the Dreads were already out in forceâ€|but the moment he and the others attackedâ€|the Cube Fighters pulled a few tricks of their own as they were able to out maneuver him when he came in close to attack. He realized that what the Master Chief had been teaching him was rightâ€|.the enemy did adapt to his fighting style and now he had to adapt as well to equalize with their new abilities and tactics.

He managed to take down a few Cube Fighters by relying on both timing and surpriseâ€|even luring the enemy units in by pretending to be injured from their attacks and that spared him the trouble of trying to catch them and he was able to even it upâ€|he even used the debris to even up the odds by hiding as best he could manage in the debris and hit the enemy hard before they could recover properly, but despite the success of his attacks, the other Cube Fighters were not



going to fall for his movements a second time and he got hitâ€¦thankfully the armor of his Vanguard was still very strong to withstand the attacks and he was able to avoid more damageâ€¦

A Cube Fighter managed to come close enough to attack himâ€¦but that fighter wasn't able to get anywhere fast as it was destroyed by weapons fire from Jura's Dread. The blonde Dread pilot then called Hibiki on the inter-com and gave him a suggestive smile and look.

"Heyâ€¦don't forget that now is the time you combine with me."

Hibiki didn't know why but that made him a lot moreâ€¦uncomfortable than he wanted to admit as he had getting this sensation since being closer to Dita. He didn't know why he was suddenly this 'aware' of femalesâ€¦but he did not trust himself at the very moment to be close to the woman right now. But before he could do anythingâ€¦another Cube Fighter came at the two of themâ€¦but was reduced into scrap by Dita's own Dread. The redhead smiled as she contacted Hibiki and spoke.

"If you want Mr. Alien, you can combine with me!"

Hibiki was getting even more uncomfortable and decided that he had enough of this non-sense as he powered up his Vanguard and left the two Dreads behind as he went off to unleash his current feelings of anxiety and unease on the Harvester Cube Fighters.

What the hell is wrong with me all of a sudden?!

Hibiki kept his focus on the job at hand and fight off another pair of Cube Fightersâ€¦while the Dreads dealt with the rest, the Boarding Craft had a smaller profile than the Cube Fighters so they were able to evade most of the Dreadsâ€¦but some were shot down both by the Dreads and Cortana's use of the Nirvana's Point Defense Guns. The Cube Fighters tried to attack the Nirvanaâ€¦but the wily and skilled UNSC AI and Nirvana gunner was more than ready to shred them for thinking that.

Three or more Boarding Craft managed to latch on the Nirvanaâ€¦but as their payloads of Shock Troopers found outâ€¦the Nirvana Fire Teams were waiting for them and they were greeted with a hail of plasma fireâ€¦bullets and lasers as the core Fire Teams and their Talvern allies poured it onâ€¦however, the Master Chief's suspicions were proven true as the Harvester Shock Troopers now made use of cover and had better tactics as several of the Fire Teams were injuredâ€¦even some of the new Talvern recruits were injured as wellâ€¦but their improved armor did have good protection and they were able to pull backâ€¦the Spartan quickly moved in to support his Fire teams and made a mess as he closed the gap with the Shock Troopers.

One Shock Trooper attempted to charge and use it's Assault Blade on the Spartan who calmly moved aside and slam the butt of his MA5C in the neck of the enemy unitâ€¦and with the Spartan's already deadly strength and powerâ€¦doubled by the Mjolnir Mark VI, the Shock Trooper's neck was easily broken and the Spartan grabbed the body and turned it around before him..using the body as a shield and fired his Assault Rifle in his one hand while holding the bodyâ€¦the dead Shock Trooper absorbed the blows from it's still living compatriotsâ€¦and

several were slain by the Spartan as he then tossed the dead body aside and fired his MA5C IWCS Assault Rifle and then quickly took out his M90A and fired several blasts at the survivorsâ€¦shredding them.

As soon as the smoke cleared, the Spartan ordered all Fire Teams to report their current statusâ€¦

"This Spartan 117 to all Fire Teamsâ€¦report status!"

"Fire Team Alpha here! Three wounded, but still fighting!"

"Fire Team Bravo here! Two wounded but we've got the Harvesters on the run!"

"Fire Team Charlie here! Three wounded and one badly hurt but we're alive and kickingâ€¦unlike the Harvesters!"

"Fire Team Delta here! Four woundedâ€¦but were all here and still kicking Harvester butt!"

Fire Team Eagle here! We've got three woundedâ€¦but we've got the Harvesters right by the noseâ€¦if they had any!"

"Fire Team Fox here! We're holding the liner despite four woundedâ€¦they picked the wrong place to party!"

The Fire Teams managed to mop up the Shock Troopers and get their wounded as the Fire Teams each reported their casualtiesâ€¦considerable injuriesâ€¦but thankfully non-fatal ones as Cortana reported that the last Boarding Craft had been shot down by the Dreadsâ€¦the last one being shot down by Meia herself. John gave the all clear command as he ordered the wounded from each team to be brought into the Medical Bay for treatment. The Security Teams acted as the escorts for their wounded kin to the Medical Bayâ€¦those of the Fire Teams who were still able to fight were placed on standby as the Spartan checked on the progress of the outside battle.

--

In spaceâ€¦

Hibiki was doing a good job at the moment and at this point he was getting the hang of the new fighting style of the Cube Fightersâ€¦but as he was about to take out the Cube Fightersâ€¦several of them suddenly charged right at him and then sent him crashing right to the surface of the planetâ€¦but he was not aloneâ€¦Dita had attempted to go with him but found out very quickly that she couldn't risk her Dread..Jura on the other handâ€¦

Despite the fact that the Dreads were never designed for atmospheric operations and hers was no exceptionâ€¦the blonde was adamant in finally combining with Hibiki's Vanguard and charged onâ€¦Hibiki was thankful that his buddy's armor plating was holding on and that he had made the precaution of having a special heat retardant coating placed onâ€¦but he was shocked when he spotted Jura following him and from what he could seeâ€¦her Vanguard's armor plating was feeling the strain of re-entryâ€¦he was no Dread specialistâ€¦but what he was seeing was certainly spelling trouble for her.

"What heck are you doing?!"

"I am not going to get left behind.."

"Are you nuts or something?! Pull up before your Dread gets torn to pieces!!"

The group made it through the atmosphere and crashed right into the ocean while several of the Cube Fighters that came along were there as they had their own heat shields active at the moment. As soon as they scanned the area something began to rise while the Nirvana crew looked at what had happened, they were relieved that Jura and Hibiki were okay but if Jura was alive then that meant that her Dread had managed to unite with Hibiki's Vanguard so what exactly was going to be the result of the fusion between her Dread and his Vanguard what sort of VanDread will come out

They got their answer and looked at the VanDread Cortana raised an eye brow and commented as the others in the bridge crew were looking on.

"A crab well that's certainly new"

However Jura was not exactly happy at the moment

--

"All right saddle up we're going to the city!"

"Yes sir!"

The Spartan looked as several of his Fire team members those who were not badly injured and ready to go went into the shuttle carrying their weapons and wearing their armor, along with some spare gear to escort the elderly bridge captain and the commander to the planet's surface. The others were to remain on combat standby in the Nirvana.

As for himself the Spartan was armed with an M90 A Shotgun and his trusty MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, he then turned to see the elderly Captain Magno and the Commander BC move towards the shuttle as the two approached the shuttle the Spartan saluted them and reported.

"Your ground escort team is ready Captain, Commander!"

Magno saluted the Spartan and so did Buzam, and the elderly woman smiled at the young warrior. This would be a normal mission of diplomacy as when they had spoken with the apparent leader of the city a blonde lady named Fanita, the elderly woman wanted to find out just what was going on there on the surface of the city and who were the Munya that the lady spoke of and what was the purpose of the festival.

"You don't have to go with us Master Chief"

"That might be true Captain but I am still duty bound to protect you as the leader of the ground operations for the ship."

Buzam nodded as there was truth in the statements of the Spartan he

was commander of the ground combat operations of the pirates and having him on the ground with them would be helpful just in case things got too dicey. She was then a bit surprised when the Spartan reached behind him and removed the M90A Shotgun and handed it to her.

"Have you ever used one of these weapons before Commander Buzam?"

Buzam nodded and that was enough for the Spartan as he reached for the ammunition compartment on his leg and took out the full loads of Shotgun shells he had and handed them to Buzam to use. He then reached for a nearby UNSC weapons crate and took out a BR55 HB SR Battle Rifle and the accompanying ammunition and placed the new weapon on his back with a thump as the magnetic pads held the weapon in place.

The Spartan and the two female officers got into the transport and then made their way down to the city which served as their target destination as soon as they left the Nirvana—escorted by a pair of Longswords to the surface of the planet with the Longswords' activating their heat shields for re-entry. He then contacted Cortana via comm.-link.

"How's the situation there Cortana?"

"Still a stalemate John—the Harvesters are still protecting the target ship and we're holding the line—on the off chance it tries something—the previous attacks did no good at all, and we still can't use the MAC Guns since that ship is too close to the planet."

"How's Hibiki and Jura?"

"Hibiki's fine and taking charge of the situation—and he's waiting for you guys on the surface—Jura's—.ummm, still out of it—I can still hear her shouting in my ears—she's calmed down—but it's not looking pretty John—you might want to talk to her to get her out of the slump she's in."

"What exactly would I say to her?"

"Be creative John—we need her head in the battle-field—besides—knowing you, you can be persuasive."

John chuckled lightly at that as the shuttle began to shake a bit as it reached the atmosphere. He merely stood while the rest of the crew were sitting down in their comfortable chairs at the moment. The pilot turned and spoke to the Spartan respectfully as she knew how capable the Spartan was in battle.

"Are you sure you wouldn't mind taking a seat Chief?"

"I'll be fine—"

"All right sir—we'll be on the city of Anpathos in a few minutes as soon as we break the atmosphere."

The transport made it's way towards the surface of the planet and soon enough the transport landed and the first out were the Fire Team

members who were carrying a spare weapons and munitions crate with them on the off chance that they would need more fire-power. They were then followed by the Master Chief and then Captain Magno and Buzam came out.

They arrived at a nearby courtyard and there was Hibiki waiting for them. The Tarak youth walked over and saluted the Spartan and the Spartan saluted his protégé as Hibiki also greeted Buzam and Magno. The elderly Captain noted that Jura had not gone with Hibiki at the moment and she was concerned on where the blonde woman had gone.

"Where's Jura?"

Hibiki pointed behind him and replied with a sign of irritation.

"Oh she's back there sulking and being a hard case. I honestly don't know what to do with her at the moment no matter what I say to her she's being hard headed and just sat there on the VanDread."

The Spartan thought it over and decided to see if he could talk some sense into Jura he had seen the machine on the view-screens and while it was certainly not the most attractive of the VanDreads he had seen so far he was not the kind of guy to judge machines on looks alone. The real power of the VanDread that Jura and Hibiki commanded was yet to be realized at the moment and they would have that chance when the time came for now they had to deal with the diplomatic mission...he however decided to go to Jura.

"Captain...I'll try and talk some sense into Jura, I'll rejoin you when I can."

Magno nodded and so did Buzam who was carrying the M90A Shotgun near her while the other Fire Team members were on the ready with their own weapons namely the support Tarak assault rifles.

The standard Tarak assault rifle known as the 'Broadsword' was a weapon that had similarities to the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and some of the characteristics of the BR55 HB Battle Rifle. The weapon had several types of ammunition standard Armor Piercing rounds, High Explosive Rounds, Incendiary Rounds, Tracer Rounds, and a High explosive-Armor Piercing mix. The weapon used a standard chemical propellant for ground operations and to the Spartan's approval it had a propellant type the men had made in order to function in zero gravity and oxygen environments which was similar to the advanced gunpowder and caseless propellant mixes used by the UNSC SDF. This gave the rifle a wide selection of options in combat and its rugged design allowed it to be easy to maintain and repair though it was more suited to desert worlds no doubt due to the nature of where it was constructed. The Spartan and Cortana had studied the weapon well and they were in approval of the design system though the weapon could undergo considerable customization when needed. Its also present bayonet blade was useful for close combat and was detachable and could be used as a close combat knife as well making it very useful.

The women who were from Megele in his Fire Teams had once hated the rifles but now consider it as a valued part of their arsenals when

they could use them in the right conditions though they stuck to the UNSC weapons and the weapons made by Cortana which were based on Covenant designs.

The Spartan took his leave but not before leaving Hibiki in charge of the safety of the Captain and Buzam and in default, until his return the Tarak youth was in command of the ground team. Hibiki beamed at this and promised not to disappoint his mentor as he saluted the Master Chief as he took off to find Jura. Magno and the others then moved on...heading for what appeared to be the central tower and where all the people of Anpathos were gathering at the moment no doubt they could find Fanita there and get some much needed answers.

--

Near the wall of the city

Jura sulked as she looked at the sea and while it was attractive that was the least on her mind as she couldn't believe that she had the ugliest of all the VanDreads. It was not fair! Dita had a VanDread which was awesome and very powerful Meia's was fast and very agile...and she got the ugliest and slowest one of all she felt like she had been cheated and it was a feeling that she despised a great deal.

(Why this?! I deserve better!)

She heard footsteps and she listened to them not caring at all at the moment but she was not in the mood to listen to Hibiki right now and she was going to make sure he got the message.

"Leave me alone! Nothing is going to change the fact that I hate this VanDread!!"

"Keep you're cool Jura".

The blonde turned and she was surprised to see the Spartan who was there before her and not Hibiki she naturally felt some level of intimidation at the tall warrior before her, but she knew that he was on her side but right now she was very despondent and was not in the mood for a conversation with anyone even the Spartan himself.

The Master Chief however was not going to let that stop him as he leaped over the wall and was now near Jura at the moment. The Spartan knew he had no idea at the moment how to speak to Jura after all, he had no idea how to deal with female vanity as he had never dealt with that side of the opposite gender before his only exposure to that was when Kelly and him were kids back then when Kelly was taller than he was she had dyed her hair blue to stand out among them eventually she returned to her normal brunette look. And he liked that more than the last one exotic as it was. He then spoke to the blonde seriously.

"What seems to be the problem Jura?"

The blonde at first didn't want to say anything at the moment but thought better of it unlike Hibiki who she could ignore at times this was the Spartan she was dealing with a man who

deserved respect and therefore deserved an answer from her when he asked her a question.

"This whole VanDreadâ€¦it's so ugly and unattractive! I don't want that ever! I wanted mine attractiveâ€¦but noâ€¦I get thisâ€¦"

The Spartan shook his head and replied.

"So you're giving up just like that because it's not pretty?"

Jura grumbled and the Spartan shook his head once more and wondered why he either wanted to punch the bridge of his nose or slap his forehead. He couldn't believe that the blonde was acting like this when she didn't get what she wanted at all. That attitude was one of the things that no military minded person should worry about as the real value of the weapon was how it performed in combat and what it could doâ€¦looks were nice, that much was trueâ€¦but utility and value was better than that. The Spartan decided to talk to Jura and see if he could help get her out of her depression as this reminded him of the time she had froze up when Meia was taken out in the space battle.

"Juraâ€¦looks aren't that importantâ€¦"

"Says you! You're not born on Megele so you won't understandâ€¦"

"Maybeâ€¦but I doubt the Harvesters care at all for looks. Just because it's not what you expected doesn't mean that it's useless. Let me tell you something, back then in my training I had a fellow Spartanâ€¦a female friend who I worked with for yearsâ€¦Kellyâ€¦she tried to stand out when she dyed her hair blueâ€¦but later on in the yearsâ€¦she took to having her usual brunette color. And she was fine no matter what hair color she hadâ€¦Kelly was normal looking, with a rough, angular beauty so to speak, in which you might say in your world's terms she was plain lookingâ€¦but she was the toughest and fastest of us."

"Looks are important but what the machine can really do is what you should be looking at, it might not be aesthetically pleasing but real strength is not in looks but ability. I'll tell you honestlyâ€¦I thought about how things would have turned out if I and the others were not Spartans onceâ€¦we'd probably be normal people living simple livesâ€¦and with the Covenant War happeningâ€¦I'd probably be either a refugee or worseâ€¦a corpseâ€¦but noâ€¦here I am now. All because Dr. Catherine saw me for what I could do and what I could achieveâ€¦not for my looks aloneâ€¦but my ability and potential."

Jura was silent as the Spartan walked over to her and she then looked at himâ€¦she was still a bit intimidated at the fact that she was seeing her own face in the Master Chief's visor but the Spartan replied in a softer tone in his voiceâ€¦no doubt trying to be diplomatic towards her.

"Your machine is importantâ€¦otherwise it would not be able to have the ability to turn into a VanDread in the first placeâ€¦everything has a purpose in the scheme of thingsâ€¦think about itâ€¦Dita's VanDread is for long range and close battles, Meia's VanDread is for speed and agilityâ€¦yours could very well do something that neither

of them can doâ€¦I don't know what that would be, only you and Hibiki can find that out. Simply put Jura, you're VanDread can be a powerful weapon and it will be able to do things none of the other VanDreads can doâ€¦but only if you are willing to get past the look of it and see it's real power. Soâ€¦are you going to see just what is the ability your VanDread has and it's potentialâ€¦or are you going to mope here all day?"

The Spartan turned and left the blonde alone to think on his words and Jura did think on them, the blonde thought long and hard about what she would do nowâ€¦she was not yet sure what to do at the moment and besidesâ€¦she didn't have the Master Chief's agility so she couldn't follow him quickly at all. She had a lot to think aboutâ€¦

--

Back at the Nirvanaâ€¦

Bart was having a serious headacheâ€¦Magno had left him in charge of the ship while she and Buzam were gone and he thought that things would be a lot easier now but boy was he wrong. The crew kept on asking him so many simple but eventually annoying question that he couldn't take it anymore and he shut down communications on the shipâ€¦but Paiway came in and told him not to flake out on the job and he felt like he was going to crackâ€¦

It was then that Cortana's face appeared in a screenâ€¦.but the former UNSC AI spoke calmly to him.

"Rough day huh?"

"Tell me about itâ€¦at least you're not the one who's needed in navigation Cortana. You have no idea how hard this stuff is."

Cortana smiled and replied.

"Actually I do Bartâ€¦.I was a former ship AI you know, I had to do a lot, advise the Captain, help target the weapon systems, manage combat data, store all manner of information, help coordinate hyperspace jumps, manage the stasis podsâ€¦the works. Trust me when I say that you're actually lucky to be managing only the ship's navigation systems, if you did everything needed to run the whole ship down to the last detailâ€¦pardon the phraseâ€¦you'd crack like an egg. Trust me Bart, it's hard but that's why it's important to keep a level head and focus on the task at hand."

"I guessâ€¦so how is it being human?"

"It's beenâ€¦interesting to say the leastâ€¦I mean, when I was still an AI, I could feel all the ranges of human feelings and emotions, knowledge and moreâ€¦but being able to actually FEEL as a human is a totally different experience. You have no idea how lucky you are in that senseâ€¦you see, as a smart AI I was a load better than most AIâ€¦but the trade off is that I have a shorter life-spanâ€¦smart AI like me learn and store data all the time and when we reach our limitsâ€¦we shut down, it's like a person thinking himself or herself to deathâ€¦not very pleasant when you think about it."



Bart gulped at that idea of thinking one's self to death, he might not get the whole picture as he was not very familiar with AI systems back on Tarak, but the thought of dying from too much knowledge was not very pleasant to him.

"I guess you're rightâ€|"

"Take it one step at a time and if you have an issue, then talk to the Captain, that canâ€|hold onâ€|I'm picking up an incoming hyperspace signatureâ€|something is arriving at the moment."

It didn't take long for the Nirvana crew to spot an incoming shipâ€|but this one was certainly NOT an allyâ€|there large number of Cube Fighters that were there told them all instantly that whatever the previous Harvester mother-ship was waiting for had just arrived.

"Looks like a containerâ€|"

"Seems to be itâ€|better contact the Captain Bartâ€|I think we're going to be in for a hell of a day."

"Don't have to tell me twice!"

It didn't take long for Cortana to alert all the Dread pilots to scramble for battle against the new arrival on the sceneâ€|she knew that things were going to get real dicey in the next few minutes and she decided to warm up the Archer Missile Pods and the Point Defense Gunsâ€|keeping the MAC Cannons on stand-by, as well as deploying another wing of Longswords into combat, The Nirvana Fire Teams also scrambled as their NCOs led them and got ready for any boarding actions that they were about to face. This fight was about to get interesting.

--

Back on Anpathosâ€|

The Master Chief had just arrived at the Tower in the center of the city itself and that was when he spotted four transmitters appear at strategic areas of the city and then he spotted a much more massive one appear at the top of the Tower itselfâ€|the Spartan had a bad feeling about this as he was now with the rest of the ground teamâ€|but the second he heard Magno arguing with a blonde woman who apparently was the leader named Fanita. The Spartan saw the looks of shock and disbelief in the faces of the Nirvana delegation and he knew things were getting even worse.

"You are acting like gullible sheep to the slaughterâ€|you have no idea how big a mistake you all are making! This is a foolish action that will result in so many deathsâ€|all because of that precious Munya you fools believe in!"

"You are the foolish ones! You come here and blaspheme against the Munya and then you think you can stop them from coming here?"

The Spartan looked at the Captain's face and could tell that things were getting real bad down here. The people of Anpathos were not armed with any weapons and they were not threatening the Captain at the momentâ€|he studied the room and spotted a mural of some

sortâ€|depicting a man who was kneeling down while a bright star was removing something the resembled a column of light from his bodyâ€|the image was somehow sending a chill of unease in the Spartan. Hibiki then turned to his mentor and he also wore a look of shock on his face.

"What's going on Hibiki?"

"Chief! These people have lost their minds! They think the Harvesters are God and they are now willing to give up their spinal cords to the bastards! They actually are going to let themselves be harvested down to the last man, woman, and child!"

"What?!"

It was then that Bart contacted the Captain and Buzam told the two elderly officers of the new arrival from the Harvestersâ€|making Magno give a grim look on her face.

"It seems your Munya have arrived."

The look of joy and worship in Fanita's face and voice as she spoke to her people as she ordered them to place on their masks made the Spartan even more angryâ€|and for good reason.

The UNSC and Covenant War was sparked all due to false religious beliefs spread by the Prophets of the Covenant all those years ago back in his universe. The Prophets lied to the Covenant about the sacred Great Journey, making them all believe that activating the Halo rings would help them reach a higher plane of existence like the Fore-Runners had doneâ€|unaware of the fact that it was all liesâ€|there was no true Great Journey, only death if the Rings were ever used. The Halo rings were all fortress worlds and mass destruction weapons that would purge all life from the galaxy. During his battles in the Ark, he had gathered a ton of data concerning the Fore-Runners, how they had fought to protect not just their race from the Flood but all other races and in the endâ€|took creatures to the Ark and gave up their lives to stop the Flood by purging the galaxy clean of life with the Halo Rings. A true Pyrrhic victory that wasâ€|and his speciesâ€|Humanity faced utter annihilation because of the lies of the Prophetsâ€|billions dead, worlds ruined, and moreâ€|The Prophets called his race as affronts to the Gods they worshipped and enemies of the Great Journey, and with that as their rallying cryâ€|they all used the other Covenant races to assault the whole human race and nearly helped annihilate his people until the schism that saved the human race and gave them a fighting chance against both the remaining Covenant and the Floodâ€|

Now the Harvesters were doing the very same thing the Prophets had doneâ€|they had deceived and lied to the people of Anpathos, and now they were going to claim these people as their own organ suppliesâ€|but these people were willing to let it happen. It sickened the Master Chief that these people were blindly walking to their deaths, thinking that they were doing the right thing, and now he had to do something quickly. No matter what happenedâ€|despite their blindness and their foolishnessâ€|he couldn't let these people sacrifice themselves to the Harvestersâ€|all because of blind faith to a collection of lies given to them by others. The Covenant did that once and nearly wiped out humanity and themselves in belief of a collection of lies told to them by the Prophets...no way was he going

to let humanity walk down the same path.

"I want no part of this stupidity!"

Magno turned to leave but she suddenly felt great pain, showing her age as both Buzam and the ground teams tried to help her to her feet but the pain forced her to remain where she was at the moment.

"Damn! of all the times for my old bones to give out on me! I guess I'm stuck here."

She then turned to Hibiki who showed concern for her well being and smiled as she gave John-117's protocol his orders.

"Hibiki! go to Jura and get up there and hold off the Harvesters. I don't plan on dying alongside these blind idiots."

Hibiki nodded and saluted as he made his way out of the area as the water began to rise all over the city! the towers were designed to act as gravity manipulators in order to raise the water level around the city in order to trap the residents of Anpathos in the tower. Magno smiled at Hibiki and then turned to face Fanita as the Master Chief and his fellow Fire Team members made sure to defend Magno! the Spartan glared at Fanita! still angry that she was willing to do this madness as Magno spoke.

"Looks like we'll be spending some time here for a while!"

Buzam then turned to the Spartan and spoke.

"Be ready for anything Chief! as soon as the Harvesters know we're here! they are no doubt going to be ready to deal with us on the ground."

--

And sure enough!

The new Harvester Ship then began to unleash another wave of support reinforcements, consisting of Cube Fighters and several Seed Ships! however! several tear drop shaped ships were moving away! they appeared to be segmented in certain areas and had lines of glowing energy on the areas that were segmented and were as large as the transport shuttles that were used by the Megele military and the pirates! that meant that they were deploying a ground force to make sure that the operation went smoothly! knowing full well that since the Nirvana was in the area! they were going to expect resistance on the ground! unaware of the fact that the Spartan himself was already there on the ground.

Cortana called it in as she contacted the Spartan.

"Chief! I'm picking up several incoming ships heading to the surface...they appear to be transports of some sort! no doubt those are some sort of ground assault force! Get ready down there!"

The Dread teams knew that the Fire Teams below would need help and quickly launched an attack with Barnette in the lead on the transports alongside the Longswords! the combined fighter wing hit

several of the transports and three of them were burning at the combined assault..but before the transports could be finishedâ€|four got away as the Cube Fighters launched a deadly counter-attack and forced the Nirvana's forces back.

The transports moved on and activated their heat shields as they began to enter the atmosphere.

--

On the surfaceâ€|

"I got you Cortanaâ€|how many?"

"At least fourâ€|the Dreads tried to intercept and so did the Longsword squadrons, they took out three of themâ€|but the others were saved by the Cube Fighters before they were finished offâ€|they'll be down there in twenty minutes!"

The Spartan nodded as Magno and Buzam got the same message from Bart and the bridge crewâ€|the Spartan quickly issued orders to the escort force to hold the tower as best they canâ€|he was going to give the Harvesters a welcome party. The Megele and Talvern members of the escort force nodded and quickly set themselves up for battle. The Spartan calmly reached for a nearby Spartan Laser and placed it on his back as he readied his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle as Buzam wished him luck..just as they got the message that Jura and Hibiki were on their way to support the others in their VanDread. The Tarak teenager was surprised to see Jura back to her old self and she was eager to see just what else her VanDread could do.

Fanita calmly replied as she gazed at them all through her mask.

"You cannot challenge the Munyaâ€|no matter what you will do they will arriveâ€|"

The Spartan quickly turned and walked over to Fanita and the blonde womanâ€|despite her own stubbornness backed away a step as the giant of a man was before her and she could see her own face in the visor of the man's helmet. And to her own admission of uneaseâ€|the Spartan spoke in a very much emotionless voice to her and her followers who also backed away a step.

"Watch me."

With that the Spartan made his way from the Tower and was ready to kick the Harvesters right in their rear ends as he saw the VanDread take off to get to the battle.

--

Outside of the cityâ€|

The Spartan moved through the city as the water began to rise but he paid that no mind as he ran through the streets and the sounds of his footsteps was loud and water leaped all the way to his shoulders as he ranâ€|he reached the wall and quickly turned around and spotted the Towers and without waitingâ€|he aimed the Spartan Laser at the main Tower and fired a highly charged beam at the towerâ€|the

structure was hit hard and was destroyedâ€|no doubt the Harvesters had not planned for the people of Anpathos to rebel and had left no reinforcements on the Tower as it fell downâ€|the structure fell and crashed into the city streets and destroyed several buildings which were crushed by the rubble.

The water began to rise slower as the Spartan turned and fired all four remaining beam charges on the smaller Towers and the water was now on the roofs of the houses below him and it would be up to his stomach. The Spartan turned as he charged the Spartan Laser with the recharge system pack he had with him and spotted the four incoming transportsâ€|his HUDS scanned the ships and he noted that they seemed to have no defensive systems to speak of and he spotted three doors on the shipsâ€|one in the front and two on the sides..no doubt to unload it's cargo and troops. The Spartan then spotted what appeared to be a convergence point where the glowing lines were and he had a thought that it was a good place to fire as it could be a weak point on the ship and took the now fully charged Spartan Laser and aimedâ€|

The beam he fired smashed had into the Harvester Transport Ship and caused a massive explosion as the ship was hit in the area that the Spartan had spotted earlier and his estimation proved to be right on the money as the gaping hole in the ship's armored hull and the explosions that followed were enough to tell him that he hit the right spot. The stricken ship was smoking and the explosions spread out inside the ship and the ship began to careen to the side and slammed into one of it's sister ships. The damaged ships tore through the hull of it's sister ship and no doubt had hit several core systems in the other ship that resulted in the second ship losing controlâ€| and the two were sent crashing into the ocean and exploded as they did so, leaving the Spartan to face the two other ships. The ships apparently decided to deploy their cargo as the doors began to openâ€|one ship however got a salvo of bolts from the Spartan Laser and it caused massive damage in the ships' cargo bay and the ship was losing altitudeâ€|however the two had unleashed their cargo regardless and the Spartan spotted the forces deployed to be the same as that of the ones he and his Fire Teams had faced on Talvern many weeks before, however, there appeared to be no heavy vehicles at the momentâ€|but small boat like units that were no doubt amphibious attack units carrying the Harvester Troopers.

The Spartan realized that these units were unknown to him and were no doubt were meant for this operation alone...and since the world they were harvesting was primarily covered in waterâ€|it would make sense that the Harvesters would have units that operated on water. The Harvester Transport ships were staying on in the sky as the boatsâ€|numbering at least a dozen came towards the city. The Spartan took careful aim with the remaining charges and fired a precise shotâ€|the shot smashed right into one of the boats and killed another as the beam lanced through the Spartan's first Harvester target..both ships exploded and the Harvesters quickly responded as they fired a massive barrage of plasma bolts at the Spartan. John-117 ducked and moved back to cover near a rise on the wall as rock fragments, plasma fire, and the smell of burning ozone filled the air.

He then moved back up and fired another Spartan Laser bolt at another transport ship and the boat was blown out of the water with a geyser to bootâ€|the bodies of the Harvester Troopers on the doomed ship

were scattered all over the water and sank like stones as the Spartan moved back to recharge the Spartan Laser. However he knew that while there were only nine of the transports leftâ€the speed that they were moving would make it harder for him to aim the Spartan Laser properly and he had to move away and take the fight into the city itself.

The Harvester Troopers of the first Transport were deployed on the wall and moved out in formationâ€but they were suddenly hit by a hail of bullets from the Master Chief's MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and three went down as the rounds tore through themâ€the Spartan followed up with a toss of the Frag Grenade and the grenade landed right into the mass of Harvester units, both the ones that fell and the others that were coming out of the transport. The grenade exploded and several of the Harvester Troopers were quickly shredded by the explosion and many were torn apart as their magenta colored blood flowed from their wounds and covered the wall. The Spartan reloaded his weapon as more of the Harvester Troopers arrivedâ€but then three of them were suddenly cut down by sniper fire and three more were cut down as the sniper rounds tore through them as well and the Master Chief couldn't help but grin a littleâ€

The Fire Team members smiled as well as they were reloading their SRS99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifles and taking aim at the coming Harvester Troopers in order to support the Spartan when they looked through the scopes. Magno and Buzam watched as this was the first time they got to see the Fire Teams in action first hand and personallyâ€the Fire Teams fired several more rounds as the Sniper Rifles roared out their shots and they saw the vapor trails of the rounds as they left the weapons. The people of Anpathos could only watch as the Munya were being forced back by these strangers and Fanita was getting moirÃ© angry at the moment but could do little.

Outside of the Tower, the Master Chief quickly reloaded his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and unleashed another aimed barrage of bullets on the Harvesters and took down three more as the powerful rifle rounds ripped through their body armor and synthetic flesh like they were nothing but cardboard and tin foil. The Spartan quickly moved from his position into a fighting retreat as the Harvester Troopers began to move in and they were all firing their plasma bolts and this time...they were using their brains as some of them ducked in the buildings nearby to avoid his shots. But they were not ready as the Spartan had three more shots left in the Spartan Laser and he placed that into good use as he aimed and fired a powerful beam shot at a band of Harvester units moving in and blew them apart in a geyser of water and body partsâ€their 'blood' mixing with the water that was up to their torsos as well as his.

The second shot was right at another band near the wall he had abandoned earlier and the resulting explosion killed ten Harvester Troopers as they were blown to chunks by the blast and those that survived found themselves being crushed by debris and shrapnel from the stone and they were wounded greatly. The Spartan quickly sought cover as the surviving Harvester Troopers unleashed a storm of plasma bolts, some hit his shields and forced him backâ€and for a good reasonâ€apparently the Harvesters were improving the plasma cannons on their troopers to compensate for his shields. But that wasn't going to stop the Spartan as he placed aside the Spartan Laser and took out his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and with a quickly running startâ€reached a nearby wall and quickly took out a Plasma Grenade.

The Spartan tossed the weapon and it landed right on the arm of a Harvester Trooperâ€|just as the trooper was about to fireâ€|

The results were explosive in every sense of the word as the Harvester Trooper's arm was blown clean off and the plasma that it was using ignited and coupled with the with the Plasma Grenade's own explosion the resulting dual detonation shredded several other Harvester Troopers and sent magenta colored blood flying all over the place..along with shredded bodies as the other Troopers were blown apart.

The Spartan quickly activated his comm.-link with Cortana and quickly asked just what was the situation up there in space at the moment as he was concerned with the battle up there.

--

Up in deep spaceâ€|

The Nirvana was currently one serious fire-fightâ€|apparently the Harvesters were unleashing more Cube Fighters and boarding craft at the pirate ship but with Cortana unleashing hell with her Archer Missiles and the Point Defense Guns and the Dreads lending in their support to the defense of the Nirvanaâ€|Cortana still will not use the MAC Guns in fear of the ship falling down on the planet and causing massive damage to the city bellow and killing all the inhabitants of the city. The Dreads had their work cut out for them as the escort Cube Fighters were better programmed in attack and defense than they were before and were giving the pirates a serious headache.

The security and Fire Teams were all ready as several of the boarding craft were already moving in and were now deploying their soldiers into the Nirvana as they were able to get past Cortana's sensorsâ€|the Fire Teams and the Security forces were now hard pressed in order to keep the Harvesters from getting a foot hold in the Nirvana from the areas where they were able to land and attach themselves to the Nirvana at the moment.

Bart was panicking but words of encouragement from Magno told him to hold the line and it was then that a new arrival came on the sceneâ€|

Hibiki and Jura were busy moving and activating the VanDread's energy shield system and to the amazement of everyone..including the blonde Dread pilotâ€|the shield covered the entire planet and that was enough to halt the Harvesters as their combined ship had attempted to finally take in the humans that resided belowâ€|regardless of the destruction that might occur on their deployed forcesâ€|

"Wow! I bet the other VanDreads can't do this!"

Jura was utterly ecstaticâ€|totally amazed by the power of her own VanDread as she realized that the Spartan was right after allâ€|real power through ability beat appearance any day. She wanted to see the other VanDreads do what hers could.

But the Harvesters were not in the mood to watch and would now have to dislodge the VanDread in order to secure the targets before them. The Cube Fighters attempted to attack the VanDreadâ€|but the

VanDread's highly dense and specially created armor more than defended it from their weapons fire..even Cube Fighters that rammed the VanDread were unable to damage it in any fashionâ€¦forcing the main ship to take action and focus it's massive vacuum style system to the VanDreadâ€¦intent on ripping it to shreds.

The inside of the VanDread shook as the Harvesters focused their attacks on them and Jura could only give a worried look.

"What are we going to do? If we remain here that thing will rip us apart! And if we leaveâ€¦then they take out the people on the planet below!"

Hibiki gritted his teeth and knew Jura was right on that accountâ€¦if they left the areaâ€¦they would leave the people on the planet defenselessâ€¦but if they stayed here, then the Harvester would no doubt rip them apart with sheer force of vacuumâ€¦it was then that he had an ideaâ€¦the ship was designed to carry humansâ€¦but can it carry more than it can handle.?

Hibiki quickly made some quick calculations the way the Master Chief taught him to do, and as soon as he was done with the data and planning it out, he went to action and contacted Cortana.

"Cortana! I'm going to take that thing out!"

"How?!"

Hibiki grinnedâ€¦

"Just watch!"

Cortana was worried as she was unsure of the integrity of the shields of the VanDreadâ€¦sure it could house an entire planet under it but there was not yet a limit determination on how much damage the shield could handle before it fell apart. She however trusted Hibiki and gave the go ahead.

With that in mindâ€¦Hibiki went on finding the controls on the VanDread and rapidly making the right adjustments and as soon as he was sure he had everything thought outâ€¦he deactivated a part of the shield but not a large hole to compromise the situation on the planet below himâ€¦and he made the direct adjustments and as soon as that was doneâ€¦a massive column of water was sent rising from the surface of the planet.

The column of water was sent right through space and slammed right into the open maw of the Harvester shipâ€¦much to the shock of just about everyone onboard the Nirvana and in the Dreads as well as they were not expecting this turn of eventsâ€¦neither was Jura as she spoke to Hibiki in a panic as the VanDread began to shake violently at the moment.

"Be careful or we'll shatter! What are you doing anyway?!"

"Don't worryâ€¦we'll be all rightâ€¦by what I've figuredâ€¦that ship was designed to gather all the humans on the surface of that world below us onlyâ€¦and that might be vastâ€¦but I rather doubt it can hold the entire planet's ocean!"



--

Down in the surface the effects were obvious. the massive column of water had slammed right into the remaining Harvester Transport ships and sent them flying upward and severely damaging them as well. the Spartan had killed several more of the Harvester Troopers and was moving backwards in what was termed a fighting retreat as he used the buildings as cover as plasma bolts were flying all over the place and the smell of ozone was everywhere. the Harvester Troopers were also caught off guard by the column of water as the ships apparently that they came from was the main source of their information and combat information. with the ships severely damaged by the rising column of water before them. The Spartan reloaded his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle as he walked back into the Tower as the Fire Teams were reloading their weapons and the Spartan focused on protecting the Captain.

--

Back in space

The Nirvana crew watched as the VanDread that Jura and Hibiki piloted was still directing the column of water right into the body of the Harvester ship and the ship was suffering the massive damage of the water entering the back cargo center behind it and the water also began to flood the internal systems and computer banks as the ship began to bulge and buckle from the unexpected and unnatural cargo. The pirates and Cortana watched on and they couldn't help but be at awe as the surface of the water planet Anpathos was stripped of the water and soon there were only large pools of water that were once vast oceans. revealing even more land.

It was then that Hibiki's predictions came true as the ship that the Harvesters had sent to harvest the people of Anpathos finally couldn't handle it anymore and broke apart as the water burst through it and ripped it from the inside out like a balloon filled with water bursting forth. the vast temperature difference of the void of space proved to make the destruction even greater

Cortana looked on with shock and amazement. and then she began to laugh out loud at the sight and spoke to Hibiki with a smile.

"Now THAT was original Hibiki!"

"That was impressive. unorthodox, but very impressive."

Gascogne replied with approval as she and the others watched the outcome as the freezing water ripped the now desiccated Harvester vessel even further. The pirates were in a jubilant mood for the new victory added to their belt over the Harvesters. while Meia and Dita were in their Dreads and the aqua haired girl sighed and spoke in the open inter-comm.

"That was totally reckless."

"But I feel envious. I wish my VanDread with Mr. Alien was like that as well."

In the VanDread Hibiki sighed in victory and then Jura was all smiles and enjoying the sight of the Harvesters beaten and the abilities of

her VanDread utterly impressed her to the coreâ€|the VanDread she had with Hibiki might not have the speed of Meia's VanDread, nor the weapon systems of the VanDread Dita commandedâ€|but hers could shield an entire world! It was awesomeâ€|so awesome she was speechless indeed.

She contacted Barnette and spoke to her friend.

"Did you get it all on tape Barnette?!"

Barnette gave a sigh and replied to her friend.

"Juraâ€|I was in the middle of a battleâ€|how the heck was I supposed to record and fight at the same time?!"

Jura gave a cry of disappointment and sighed as she realized that she had lost her chanceâ€|but stillâ€|she was happy that everything turned out all right. She then gave Hibiki a very seductive and sly lookâ€|and that got Hibiki's attention as Jura edged closer to him since the chairs in the VanDread they formed with their respective machines were able to move about in the cockpit.

"What are you doing?!"

Jura smiled and then hugged Hibiki and spoke in a low and seductive tone.

"From now onâ€|you'll combine only with meâ€|won't you?"

Hibiki didn't know why but he was suddenly getting hot and bothered by Jura's close proximity and the Tarak youth couldn't help but suddenly feel this odd stirring in his stomach and heart as the blonde came ever closer and he found out that despite his best intentionsâ€|he found himself giving her the once over and he found himself looking at Jura's breastsâ€|and he couldn't help but look onâ€|

"HEY! LEAVE MR. ALIEN ALONE!!"

The two turned and there was Dita on the screen with a deep look of anger and something elseâ€|jealousy. The redhead was not happy when she saw Jura being close to her Mr. Alien and she was not in the mood for her comrade Jura getting too familiar with Hibiki. Jura glared back and replied.

"Leave us alone Dita! From now onâ€|he's combining with me!"

"No he won't!!"

"Oh yes he will!"

"No!"

--

In the Towerâ€|

Fanita fell in shock and anger as her mask fell off her face and she was in shock as she couldn't believe what had happened right before her eyes. These strangers had defeated the Munyaâ€|they had destroyed

their chance for salvation and she couldn't abide by it anymore.

"Youâ€¦how could you?!"

Magno looked at Fanita as she could see that the blonde leader of the people of Anpathos was bristling with fury and she replied.

"We did what we knew what was rightâ€¦unlike you my dear."

"HOW CAN YOU?! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO DO THIS BLASPHEMY!!"

The Fire Teams couldn't believe the audacity of the womanâ€¦they had helped save her and her people from a fate worse than anything they could ever dream of..and yet she believed that she was leading the people of her world to the right path. Fanita was so angry that she walked towards the elderly womanâ€¦making the others in the Nirvana landing party tenseâ€¦but the blonde leader would not get any further as she found herself being stopped by the massive frame of the Master Chiefâ€¦.she gasped and backed away a bit as the Spartan glared at herâ€¦and she saw her own face looking back at her in a way that was rather unnerving to say the least.

The Spartan then spoke evenly without emotionâ€¦save a slight trace of contempt.

"You're Gods planned to butcher you and strip you of your spinesâ€¦every last one of youâ€¦there is no salvation with the Munyaâ€¦only your violent and painful deathsâ€¦yet you were willing to lead your people into this fate. You are not worthy of being a true leader and you are a fool."

"Youâ€¦"

"There is no salvation with the Munyaâ€¦none at allâ€¦except the salvation you gain with your own hands. You are no longer sheepâ€¦but free living beings."

The Spartan then looked around to the peopleâ€¦and the people in the Tower saw him looking at them all and they couldn't help but feel the urge to back away.

"You say you live in the most beautiful world in the universeâ€¦then go out there and prove it. You say that this planet is paradiseâ€¦then go out and make it one. You say you are happyâ€¦then go out and make yourselves happy. You are the ones to decide your fateâ€¦not the false Gods you pray toâ€¦and their lies."

He then moved glared at Fanita and despite her angerâ€¦she moved back and then she tripped a bit and the mask fell from her face.

With that saidâ€¦the Spartan looked at everyone assembled in the Tower who were from Anpathos and then lifted the mask that Fanita had dropped when she backed away from him on the floor and he spoke.

"You are freeâ€¦use your freedom well."

And without fanfareâ€¦he crushed the mask in his hand and let the shards of the now destroyed symbol of the vaunted Munya of the people

of Anpathos fall to the ground and then he crushed the mask fragments even further with his boots, right in front of the still glaring Fanita. Without anything else the Spartan gave the signal for the Fire Teams to pack it up and get ready for evacuation as the Spartan arrived to Magno and offered his hand to the elderly Captain.

"It's time to leave this place Ma'am."

Magno smiled and replied as she took his arm as he helped her up.

"Yesâ€¦let's do that Master Chief."

The Spartan helped Buzam with Magno and they left the Tower and looked at the water soaked city and the remains of the Harvester Troopers that they were able to defeat with the time given to them and the Spartan took his leave and quickly ran towards the wall with great speedâ€¦to the still existing awe of the Fire Team members and he looked out over the wallâ€¦he saw the now waterless landscape and saw the remains of the colony ship that brought the ancestors of Anpathos to their worldâ€¦and there were other landmasses there in the areaâ€¦The Spartan surveyed the land and nodded as he knew that with this doneâ€¦the people of Anpathos were given a chance to truly live their livesâ€¦on their terms and not by others.

As they boarded the shuttle and were now on their way back to the Nirvanaâ€¦the two officers turned to the Spartan and Buzam spoke first.

"Master Chiefâ€¦you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Not at all Ma'am."

"You seemed very offended by Fanita when she told us of what they intended to doâ€¦why was that the case? I do not fault you for rescuing the people of Anpathosâ€¦but why did you go so far as to crush Fanita's mask twice?"

The Spartan replied after a moment of silence.

"Because she reminds me of the Prophetsâ€¦"

"The Prophetsâ€¦you mean the leaders of the Covenant back in your world?"

"Yesâ€¦she was willing to blindly follow the Harvesters and their lies and she made her people do the same thing. The Prophets convinced the other races of the Covenant to follow them in a false Great Journey and activate the Halo Ringsâ€¦even if they should have known about the fact that the Halo Rings were designed to wipe out all life in the Universe..no matter who's side they were on."

"That is the ultimate betrayal of humanity by anyone..leading them willingly to their own genocideâ€¦under the Articles of UNSCDF High Command, I should have executed that woman for her actionsâ€¦but I stopped because I want them to know the truthâ€¦when the Arbiter and his race the Elites knew the truth of the Halo Rings and how the Prophets lied to themâ€¦they turned their backs and fought beside us. I want the people of Anpathos to know the truth of the Gods they worship and decide for themselvesâ€¦will they follow a false religion

blindlyâ€|or live for their own ideals?"

Magno thought about that and couldn't fault the Spartan for his choice as the shuttle arrived at the Nirvana. As soon as the shuttle docked in and the Fire Teams left the ship...there was Cortana who walked up to the Spartan and smiled at him and held his hand.

"You did great John."

"Thanks."

--

Laterâ€|

After leaving the planet of Anpathos behind, the Nirvana was well underwayâ€|and things had gotten back to normalâ€|those injured Fire Team members who defended the Nirvana were brought in for medical treatment in the Medical Bay and those who had survived were either celebrating or busy relaxing for yet another mission well done.

The Dread pilots were tired and were resting wellâ€|though a certain blonde and redhead were busy arguing over a certain protÃ©gÃ© of the Spartan and Vanguard pilotâ€|and he was busy trying to placate both girls at the moment. Cortana was busy doing some monitoring work in the bridge as she had deployed the Clarion Spy Drones to watch over the area before them.

In his quarters in the Forward Unto Dawnâ€|the Spartan took the time to rest and recuperateâ€|at the momentâ€|the Spartan was out of his Mjolnir Mark VI and in some military fatiguesâ€|he knew that they had won yet another victoryâ€|but he knew that the Harvesters would no doubt be very angry and would no doubt plan something majorâ€|and despite the high spirits of everyone in the Nirvanaâ€|he had a feeling that sooner or laterâ€|they were going to need more allies to face the Harvestersâ€|though the question that plagued his mind was where they would find those needed allies.

For now...he closed his eyes and went to sleepâ€|there would be time to plan that all out later.

--

To be continuedâ€|

--

Author's notes:

Wellâ€|this chapter was finished and we get to move on to the next situation that the crew of the Nirvana will find themselves in. Only this one will not be a battle and will be a chance to see just what sort of person the Master Chief is when there's no fighting involved.

The Harvesters will not be idle and that will be proven true in the coming chapters as they will not take well to this latest defeat of their forces against the Nirvana and as it stands..things will get even more hairy and difficult for the Nirvana's crew and even more so for the Spartan and that will prove to be an adventure to the

extreme. And now on a more serious noteâ€¦

I have recently been reading all that I can find on the Halo universe and since many have been asking me if I will include more Halo charactersâ€¦my answer to the question is yesâ€¦it will still be a long while before I can create a decent angle that can allow me to include key characters from the Halo universe into the universe of VanDreadâ€¦though you can be assured that sooner or later. these characters will play a pivotal role in the soon to come chapters of this story.

Until thenâ€¦please be patient as I gather more material, to create the next chapter of VanDread Halo. Because we're going to see just how the Master Chief handles being out of combatâ€¦and will there be a chance for the girls and Cortana to get closer to the Spartan?

Well thenâ€¦wait and see!

## 14. Chapter 14

VanDread - Halo

Disclaimer: I own nothing related to either VanDread or Halo

### Chapter 13

Christmasâ€¦

( ): Thoughts

--

In spaceâ€¦

The Nirvana was once more abuzz with activity and the women were currently carrying cans and boxes of decorations and they seemed to be decorating the entire ship and even the rest of the Nirvana's Fire Teams seemed to be taking part in the whole celebration bit as they were in their normal Megele clothes and having a great deal of fun as they helped.

Even the Talvern soldiers were joining in and helping out their Megele allies doing what they were doing as well as they would carry boxes and other materials for use as well in what seemed to be some sort of celebration

The only members of the crew who had NO idea what was going on was obviously the men from Tarak as they looked on in confusion.

"What the heck are they all doing at this time of the day?"

Bart asked as he had no idea of what was going on at the moment and neither did Duero and Hibiki at the moment..it was then that Pyoro floated into the area and decided to educate the three men on what exactly was going on at the moment with the women.

"Today is December 25th, usually in this day the women get ready to celebrate Christmas."

"Christmas?"

The floating Navigation Robot looked at the men and realized that it was going to take a while before the men would understand just what Christmas was.

"Don't tell me none of you have any idea what Christmas is?"

The silence of the three men plus the confused expressions was more than enough to tell the robot that they didn't have a clue and it sighed and explained.

"It's a yearly festival! Don't tell me you men don't have festivals on Tarak?"

"Oh we doâ€|but it's mostly military parades and showing offâ€|not exactly entertaining to say the leastâ€|.right guys?"

"No kiddingâ€|"

Hibiki said as he winced at the memory of the last festival he had managed to sneak in to watch and found it extremely boring totally odd at the time. While the festivals celebrated important datesâ€|they were mostly the birthdays of leaders and whatnot.

"I agreeâ€|the festivals back home were not that pleasing either."

--

In the Nirvana hallwaysâ€|

Dita panted a bit and relaxed herself and slowed down as she turned around and was happy that neither Jura nor Barnette were after her at the moment.

The redhead had been running away as she had made a rather serious mistake with the Christmas turkey and it had been turned from prime food material to kitchen disasterâ€|she had secretly sampled the chocolate icing Barnette was making for the cake when Jura hit her on the head and reminded her on her duty watching the turkey and when she turnedâ€|she saw the whole mess and high tailed it out of the area.

She turned and there was Cortana with a handful of decorations as wellâ€|the redhead smiled at her friend from the UNSC and spoke to herâ€|unlike the othersâ€|even Mr. Alienâ€|she preferred to call Cortana by her real name and no nicknames as well.

"Cortana! Need any help with those?"

"Sureâ€|I might be strong but I don't have an extra set of hands."

The redhead helped Cortana carry some of the more numerous decorations to help lessen the load Cortana had to carry and while they were bringing those to the area where Christmas would be celebratedâ€|the redhead asked her companion a question.

"Do you celebrate Christmas back in the UNSC?"

Cortana shook her head and replied.

"Noâ€¦I was a military ship smart AI back then, remember? I knew about Christmas and I did help in the celebrations but fully experience it for myselfâ€¦no. This'll be my first celebration as a human for that matter."

"I seeâ€¦well I hope you will find it niceâ€¦but does Mr. Green Alien celebrate Christmas too?"

Cortana was a bit sad at that and replied.

"Johnâ€¦didn't have much of a civilian life Ditaâ€¦he's a Spartan after all."

Dita was shocked by that and was very much feeling sorry for the Master Chief and she however quickly perked up and spoke to the somewhat silent woman who was her friend and advisor when it came to being with Hibiki as she didn't want to see the normally charming, witty, smart, brave, and friendly Cortana this sad.

"Don't worry Cortanaâ€¦I have a feeling Mr. Green Alien will finally get to have a real fun time with this year's Christmas celebration!"

Cortana smiled at the cheerful redheadâ€¦sometime her enthusiasm was a bit tiringâ€¦but was certainly welcome when things were bad and down.

(She certainly knows how to make a person feel back on track and on the game.)

"I hope so too Dita."

"By the wayâ€¦do you think that Mr. Alien will give me something nice for Christmas?"

Cortana smiled at that and wondered just when was Dita ever going to call Hibiki by his real nameâ€¦it would be considered nicer that way despite how well their relationship had blossomed for the past few monthsâ€¦then againâ€¦Dita was still the same and she knew she couldn't change that too much.

"That's up to Hibikiâ€¦though I have a feeling that he would have no idea at the moment on what to give you."

"What about Mr. Green Alienâ€¦will you get something from him?"

Cortana recalled the time she teased John about not getting her anything and smiled a bit at the funny memory in her mind and replied.

"I guess I'll have to wait and see right?"

--

The Forward Unto Dawn section of the Nirvanaâ€¦



The Spartan was busy training with his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle in the firing range as he thought about the upcoming Christmas celebration as the sound of weapons fire filled the range..Truth be told he had no desire to be involved with the situation and it was not that he didn't know about the festivalâ€|it was the fact that he had no idea just how to act in such an occasion.

Having lived a full scale military life ever since being inducted into the Spartan II Program and fighting for nearly 3 decades ever sinceâ€|he had no memory of Christmas to say the least and had no idea on what do in days like thisâ€|unlike the UNSC Marines and Navy personnel that he worked with and who had prior civilian lives before and during their times of service in the UNSC and were given leave timesâ€|he and his Spartan team were notâ€|they were either training, meditating, and getting ready for the next missionâ€|and 30 years of combat with the Covenant non-stop naturally left no time for celebrationsâ€|brief victory celebrations were doneâ€|but he was no fan of large ones and he was not a very comfortable person when thrust in the public eye.

Even though he had VERY vague memories of Christmas in his pastâ€|he had forgotten the whole thing and it was fairly obvious to him that he had not been in any Christmas celebration at all in his 30 years of combat and training. The only thing he knew about Christmas was that it involved gift giving of some sort.

The Spartan put those thoughts aside as he reloaded his Assault Rifle and activated the safety and placed the weapon on his back and then made his way to the armory to leave his weapon there for the time being. He had given the Fire Teams leave to celebrate Christmas with their comradesâ€|and the Talvern soldiersâ€|having been familiar with Christmas also were given the time off to celebrate as well. The Spartan merely walked on and did his rounds as he checked the records once moreâ€|Unlike the Megele pirates, their Tarak allies, and their new Talvern comradesâ€|the Master Chief didn't have a civilian life like they did, and even though he was a civilian nearly 27 years agoâ€|it was long gone from his mindâ€|he was a Spartan.

The Spartan then decided to see just what was happening on the Nirvana at the moment as he had not much to do at the moment. He was still wearing his MJOLNIR Mark VI Armor and was now on his way towards the rest of the Nirvana.

--

In another part of the Nirvanaâ€|

The three Tarak men were busy asking Pyoro questions about this Christmas when the doors opened and in walked one of the Talvern soldiers who was part of the Fire Teams.

Private 1st Class Felix Riddick was one of the Talvernian volunteers who had walked forward to join the detachment of his fellow men and women to help the pirates for their mission to head home and the young soldier was finding the people on the Nirvana to be the odd bunchâ€|the men had no idea on womenâ€|with the exception of the young one named Hibiki who was the master Chief's student and protÃ©gÃ©, he seemed to be a lot more receptive towards women than the other twoâ€|though he could tell that the three were still unsure

around women.

Felix had deep brown hair that was in a boyish hair-cut and was tallâ€|nearly as tall as Duero and he carried himself as a young but strong and dependable front line fighter. He had been in a relationship with a young woman back homeâ€|but she had been killed in a car accident and he was heart broken but lived on and dedicated himself to his dutyâ€|for now he was able to hear about them asking questions on Christmas.

"Hey there guysâ€|what's going on?"

Hibiki turned and replied.

"We were asking questions on this whole Christmas thing."

Felix gave them a confused look and asked.

"You don't celebrate Christmas on Tarak?"

The three men shook their heads and the young Private couldn't help but be shockedâ€|everyone he knew on his world of Talvern Prime celebrated Christmasâ€|and every person knew about the long standing tradition of Christmasâ€|to think that there were people who didn't was a shock to the young soldier. He then decided to fill them in on the details so they won't make a misinterpretation on things before them at the moment.

"Well you want to know more?"

Duero, Hibiki, and Bart turned and were surprised with Duero being the one to ask the question.

"You celebrate Christmas on Talvern?"

"Oh yesâ€|I've been celebrating Christmas for at least six years and it never gets oldâ€|.so basically from what the Navi-robot told you, you know that it's held every December 25th right?"

"Yeahâ€|so what so special about Dec 25th?"

"Well it's a long storyâ€|"

--

In another part of the Nirvanaâ€|

"All rightâ€|let's get those decorations over there!"

Corporal Leila Kendrick was busy moving the large number of boxes and she was enjoying the buzz of peaceful though frantic activity at the moment and that was a good thing as she liked a peaceful situation more than once. Leila had to admit that being around the Megele females was surprising as she heard all sorts of rumors being moved aboutâ€|namely about the new men on the ship.

Leila was a blonde beauty with deep blue eyesâ€|and amazingly enoughâ€|she was almost a mirror image of Jura as she had the same height and buildâ€|but unlike the Dread pilotâ€|Leila was a skilled soldier and was wearing normal military issued clothes of a tank top

and camouflaged combat pants and bootsâ€¦.though she had every intention of wearing civilian dressâ€¦she was also toned with muscleâ€¦not large amounts but showing considerable muscle tone and unlike the blonde Megele woman with the long mane of golden hairâ€¦she had her hair in a short style up to her shoulders only.

As the blonde soldier placed the box downâ€¦one of the Megele crew-members went up to her and asked a question.

"Excuse me?"

"Yes?"

"You grew up around men all your life right?"

Leila was confused at first and made that fairly obvious with her answer to the question.

"Yes I haveâ€¦my father was a man and my mother was a woman if you wanted to knowâ€¦why are you so surprised by it?"

"Wellâ€¦on Megeleâ€¦we're an all female society and we see men as inferior and more."

Leila was surprised at thisâ€¦while she knew that some women on her worldâ€¦being ultra-feminists would have liked the ideaâ€¦she was not a big fan of it and wondered just what sort of world to these women live inâ€¦having no men on the planetâ€¦that was way too odd for the blonde soldier.

"You can't be seriousâ€¦how do you even manage to have children?!"

Leila was immediately told about how Megele society grew and flourished and she was not quite happy at what she learnedâ€¦apparently the women of Megele were able to reproduce using artificial methodsâ€¦with the one woman consenting to be the father of the child and donating her DNA and the ohma, who was the mother would use her egg and have it fertilized by the fahma's DNA and the ohma would carry the baby to term. And when she heard about how men were seen by the Megele women she was not happy with the whole thing and she made it quite obvious to the woman talking to her.

"You can't be seriousâ€¦that is just oddâ€¦I know that it's your culture and allâ€¦but to me it's really weird!"

"And how do women on your world have children?"

Leila smiled at that and spoke honestlyâ€¦after allâ€¦she knew some of her comrades had done the deed beforeâ€¦though none of them were expecting kids at all at the moment.

"Why do you think we live with men?"

The Megele girl was horrified and she spoke in a very shocked tone.

"That'sâ€¦so wrongâ€¦you can't possibly have a child with a man!"

"Heyâ€|I'm the product of a union between men and women hereâ€|my mother and my father, who is a man mind you, had me as their child."

"Butâ€|can you really have a child with a man?"

"Yesâ€|you canâ€|and it's a rather interesting and fun experienceâ€|especially if you happen to be very close to the man and that's where being with a man can be really funâ€|one of the high lights of a woman's lifeâ€|where I come from anyway, is when a woman manages to have a man in her lifeâ€|in every sense of the word.

"How can being with a man be fun?"

For the first time since learning about Megeleâ€|Leila grinned at the question and then she gave a sly look.

"You have no idea how much fun it is to be with menâ€|it can be a great experience once you get used to them and learn their unique quirks. After thatâ€|wellâ€|let's just say that if you manage to get it right off the batâ€|then things get VERY interesting."

"How much fun can being with men be?"

Leila just smiled and then she spoke to her companions just how much fun being with men wasâ€|.she knew that she would get into trouble at some point but heyâ€|where was life without risk?

--

Back with the menâ€|

"I seeâ€|so who is this Santa Claus?"

"Santa Claus is the shorter term of Saint Nicholasâ€|a famous person who would always come to deliver toys and gifts to those who were nice boys and girls during Christmas time. He's a jolly fellow who wears red and whiteâ€|and has white hair and beard and always rode on a sleight with several reindeer pulling along the sleight. At least that's how he's seen in the normal versions. I can bet that the women of Megele have their own version of Santa Claus. As wellâ€|considering the fact I saw the elderly captain dressed like him"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Wellâ€|in some places Santa Claus has reindeer and a sleight that flies on the air currents and he goes down chimneys to deliver presents and usually is given cookies and milk by those expecting him and he usually places those said gifts inside socks of some sort."

"He can fly?! Coolâ€|makes me wish I can do that."

"Yeahâ€|though the one thing that always astounds most people who hear about it is how a portly old man with a golden heart manages to sneak into a chimney that's a lot smaller than he isâ€|even when I was a kid I never got the idea on how he even manages to get in thereâ€|and I am willing to bet I wasn't the only

one."

"Fascinatingâ€¦to think that such a festival actually existed in our ancestor's timesâ€¦what else can you tell us?"

Felix thought it over and replied.

"You know about gift giving right?"

Hibiki and the others looked at one another and gave confused looksâ€¦making Felix sweat drop at the fact that his Tarak allies knew nothing about that part of Christmasâ€¦he decided to ask the question that had been plaguing him ever since meeting the three Tarak men.

"What sort of festivals do you guys from Tarak have?"

Felix was shocked by what he was told and he couldn't help but feel sorry for the men before him.

(These guys have no idea of how to have a grand timeâ€¦man, we've got to remedy this.)

It was then that a door opened and out came a certain redhead who smiled warmly and rushed towards Hibiki.

"Mr. Alien!!"

--

In yet another part of the Nirvanaâ€¦

Captain Garret Harington looked at the group before him and shook his head as he sat down on the nearby bench and spoke.

"All right ladiesâ€¦let's try that again and this timeâ€¦please try not to sound like condemned menâ€¦and women okayâ€¦this is Christmas for crying out loud! It's supposed to be a day of celebration and you make it sound like a day in the hangman's nooseâ€¦come onâ€¦liven up that performance!"

The grizzled soldier looked at the bunch of his fellow Talvern soldiers and wished that they had more time to practiceâ€¦when he had found out that the day of Christmas was fast approaching he got a good number of his fellow Talvern soldiers together and formed a surprise number for the celebrationâ€¦howeverâ€¦they barely had enough time to practice and the war veteran was doing his best to make dueâ€¦

Garret had his normal military haircut broken with a long ponytail and his silver grey hair made him look older than he really wasâ€¦he had been a veteran of nearly twenty years in the militaryâ€¦enlisting when he was fresh out of college and had done a lot of combat training over the yearsâ€¦he had been among the soldiers during the siege of the Harvesters on his home world and was eager for a chance for some paybackâ€¦

He was also impressed by the Spartanâ€¦he had watched the videos of the Master Chief's abilities and saw a rough and tumble ground pounder like the rest of his groupâ€¦he might have been a Navy NCO as

he was familiar with the rank but the Spartan was a seriously skilled fighter. He had been told by the Fire Teams and his fellow soldiersâ€|those who had taken part in the previous mission and that one on their old home-world how he had molded the Fire Teams into what they were and that was good to him.

The veteran placed that out of his mind and tried to work the performance of his group and when they repeated the practice another five timesâ€|the grizzled war veteran was now somewhat content.

"All right! Now that's more like itâ€|grab some rest timeâ€|when the countdown startsâ€|you all get ready to sing and have funâ€|that's an order!"

Garret turned and grabbed a nearby glass of cold orange juice and sighed as he held the drinkâ€|he would have settled for Firecracker Beer but getting drunk on Christmas Day and getting himself thrown in the brig was not one of his favorite thingsâ€|besides thatâ€|he was not in the mood to do something that would be considered indecent and dangerous before his Tarak and Megele comrades at the moment.

As he finished his drinkâ€|he decided to take a peek at the rest of the ship and saw that the women were going at it and he knew that soon things were going to get even more spectacular as soon as he and his group got ready their contributions to the Christmas celebrations.

--

In the Kitchenâ€|

Jura and Barnette were not very happy as they gazed at the burned turkey and looked at the newly thawed oneâ€|there was not enough time to ready another roasted thanks giving turkey in time for the soon to come dinner and that was not a good signâ€|

"What are we going to do? We don't have enough time to properly marinate this one and it would take another hour or so to cook this oneâ€|we'll be lateâ€|I wish Dita wasn't such a ditz at times!"

Barnette had to agree and wished that maybe there was some answer to their situation as she was not in the mood for all the hard work to go to wasteâ€|the two then noted that they had a visitorâ€|in the form and armor of the master Chiefâ€|the Spartan had heard the whole thing and was somewhat curious on what was happening.

"Is there something wrong?"

Jura sighed and pointed to the turkeyâ€|or what used to be the turkey that now resembled something out of an inferno.

"Oh yes there is something wrongâ€|the turkey's ruined and we don't have enough time to marinate and cook another oneâ€|by the time we're done with thisâ€|we'd have now make due with only side dishes for the Christmas feast!"

"I seeâ€|"

Jura then had an idea.

"Hey Chiefâ€¦can you cook?"

Barnette was surprised at that question and spoke out.

"You can't be seriously asking him that question Juraâ€¦he's a soldierâ€¦not a chef!"

The Spartan was not the least bit offended by the remarkâ€¦since it was trueâ€¦he had been so used to military rations and more that he was not a skilled cookâ€¦though he did have wilderness survival training on Reach and was quite familiar with some of the basic cooking techniques such as boiling, and roastingâ€¦not to mention eating wild berries and fruits back in his training days.

"Barnette is correct Juraâ€¦I don't know how to cook, I know some of basic cooking methods like roasting and boiling food items but that's about it. But I can learn quicklyâ€¦all I need is a guide."

Jura thought it over and then had an interesting idea as she looked at Barnette.

"There's an ideaâ€¦Barnetteâ€¦maybe you can teach the Master Chief how to cook?"

"WHAT?!"

Barnette had no idea how to react to that question at allâ€¦she didn't know whether to laugh, feel insulted, or what. The idea of a woman teaching a man how to cook was totally unheard of on Megele and seemed utterly ludicrous to her sensibilities and she didn't respond at first until she gathered her wits made sure she didn't look like an idiot and leave her mouth openâ€¦and she spoke.

"Juraâ€¦are you listening to yourselfâ€¦we have less than four hours before the celebration startsâ€¦and you expect me to teach a man who admits that he knows NOTHING about the finer points of cooking how to cook?!"

Jura nodded and repliedâ€¦

"Yesâ€¦but think about itâ€¦all the Master Chief needs is a guide and you're the best cook in the ship that I know of. Besides if he could be able to learn at a rapid pace then that would be no problemâ€¦and with his abilities, speed, and skillâ€¦that will be enough to get enough dishes out and ready before the dinner party."

"Butâ€¦"

Jura looked at Barnette and spoke gently.

"Please Barnetteâ€¦this is Christmas and we can't afford to be late and besides, you can guide him very well and with his learning curve it would not be a problem."

Barnette tried to think up an excuse but she couldn't think or find one that could try and reason with the blonde Dread pilot before her at the moment. But she decided that with the time constraints as they were at the moment she could certainly need all the help she could get at the momentâ€¦she still had her misgivings but she decided to

do thisâ€|though she was not liking the situation.

"All rightâ€|I'll do itâ€|but what about the turkey?"

The Spartan provided the answer for them as he spoke to them.

"You can go to the Forward Unto Dawn and head for the kitchen sectionâ€|use the map. The automated kitchens there will be able to make a well roasted turkey for you."

Jura nodded and headed for the Forward Unto Dawn section of the Nirvana and that left John with Barnette and the emerald haired Dread pilot looked at the seven foot tall Spartan who was dressed in his MJOLNIR Mark 6 armor and in the one place she thought she would never see him in and that was in the kitchenâ€|it was so odd and unexpectedâ€|she had no idea on whether to laugh or be disgustedâ€|it was then that the Spartan turned to the Dread pilot and spoke

"All right then Barnette, shows me how this is done."

--

Dita and the others were currently looking about the ship to find some other decorations to add to the celebrations in Christmas. Hibiki was not into the whole thing at first but at Dita's mentioning of the soon to come Christmas feast made Hibiki willing to help out in the searchâ€|the two were also accompanied by Duero, Bart, Cortana, and Felix as they were also interested to see just what was here on the ship.

They entered a particular room and then they tried to look for any trace of Christmas decorations and when Hibiki leaned on a nearby wallâ€|there was a creaking sound and then the wall fell out of place. The group quickly found themselves looking at a massive number of dolls, furniture, items and moreâ€|many of them were unrecognizable at first until Felix grinned and spotted something that was easy for him to recognize. He picked up the item that resembled a hand crafted child's doll and he admired the craftsmanship.

"I'll be darnedâ€|this looks like an old hand crafted dollâ€|first time I saw one of these things."

"What's all this stuff?"

Dita asked as she looked at the items before her at the momentâ€|Cortana took a peek and quickly saw the large collection of dust and the way the items were arranged at the moment and the various items told the former UNSCAI what they had just found.

"I think we found a sealed off section that housed stored items during the Colonization Era of this dimension's Earth. The colonists here must have stored these here and must have forgotten all about it when the Ikazuchi was separated during the older days and this place was forgotten when the Ikazuchi was retrofitted by the men of Tarak as a military vessel."

Duero ran his finger on the dust and the thickness of the dust made him agree with Cortana's assessment.



"Cortana has the right answerâ€¦judging from the dustâ€¦no one's ever been here for the past hundred years. Still to see all these artifacts in our own ship and to know that all these items were right under our very noses for that matter is rather surprisingâ€¦I guess looking throughout the ship can yield even more information on how things were back in the Colonization Era."

"Hmmâ€¦I still am not sure what we can do with all these thingsâ€¦"

"Heyâ€¦what's this thing?"

The other turned and looked at Dita as she produced something that seemed like a rectangular object and it had some decorations on it and the words 'Xmas with the Family'.

"What do you suppose this is?"

Bart asked as he and Hibiki looked at the item and Cortana and Felix recognized the item rather wellâ€¦with the Talvern soldier commenting.

"That looks like an old Earth style VHS cassette tapeâ€¦it's hard to imagine that something like this survived being here all these yearsâ€¦the film in it should have already corroded by nowâ€¦this must be a fully restored version."

"Yeahâ€¦as far as I recallâ€¦VHS tapes have long since been out of use where me and John are fromâ€¦we basically use holograms and data crystal chips to store and contain dataâ€¦this thing must be pretty valuable to the people in the Colonial Fleet for it to have been preserved for this long period of timeâ€¦"

"Can we see what's inside?"

"I'm not sure we can at the moment Ditaâ€¦VHS cassettes need a player system for itâ€¦but if the VHS tape is hereâ€¦then chances are that the system unit is here as wellâ€¦all we have to do is find it."

It didn't take long for the small group to find the system needed in question and with a little fiddling they were finally able to get the VHS player online and placed it on a nearby television unit and it was soon ready to play. Unknown to themâ€¦they had wired it directly into the live video feeds in the entire ship.

--

Back in the kitchenâ€¦

Barnette was busy giving directions to the Spartan as he moved about in a very quick and agile pace and his hand and eye coordination was flawless. Barnette had to work hard not to gape in shock and disbelief as the Spartan went about the chores being assigned to him by her with an almost machine like speed with human grace. He chopped the vegetables well and in perfect order, and the meat was well sliced, bread was evenly made, eggs were there, along with other ingredientsâ€¦along with the measuring of the water, spicesâ€¦as all she had to do was show the Master Chief the measurements and how it was done and then the Spartan quickly got it into the need of things and was literally cooking up a storm right before her eyesâ€¦

It seemed that the very same precision military training and upbringing could be applied to civilian life after all as the Master Chief methodically prepared every dish just to specifications given to him by Barnette. Already dishes which took a longer time were being prepared in record time by the Master Chief and she couldn't help but look on and give instructionsâ€|the food dishes that were there were now growing in number as the Spartan was moving all out to get the food prepared and when Barnette sampled the foodâ€|to her amazementâ€|the food was delicious to the tasteâ€|just as the Spartan was one of the most skilled soldiers she had seen, he was just as good a cook as she wasâ€|even more as the food matched her requirements flawlessly.

(I'll be damnedâ€|if the Spartan was a womanâ€|she'd be one HELL of a chef! No one I know moves this fast and efficiently and still make good food on the go!)

The Dread pilot wasn't the only one as several of the Nirvana crew came there and smelled the food being preparedâ€|naturally they assumed it was Barnette doing the cooking along with the other cooks in the galley helping outâ€|they were stunned to see the Spartan doing the work and Barnette was merely supervising the whole thing.

It had gotten so fantastic that the Talvern soldiers got to see it and were themselves amazed at the fact that the fearsome and very much skilled fighter who they had joined with could be such a skilled cook.

Already there were a large number of dishesâ€|including roasted and fried fish, along with boiled soup fish, fried chicken, baked chicken, roasted beef ribs, beef stew, noodles, vegetable salads, fruit salads, and even more. The Spartan completed each with swift and efficient military precision and followed the instructions down to the letter and the food was all readyâ€|and as he finished the last mealsâ€|he turned to Barnette and replied.

"That should just about do it."

"No kiddingâ€|"

In less than an hour and a half, the meals for the Christmas feast had doubled and it was then that Jura returned with a sweet smelling well roasted turkey from the UNSC section's kitchen..she was impressed and had tried a sample earlier and found the meat to be cooked down to specifications and that was a very good thing in her mind and when the blonde looked at the fully prepared food ready to be catered out to the main hall area for the partyâ€|she whistled.

"Wowâ€|I guess having the Chief help out in the food preparations was a great idea after all. The turkey's just about perfect and all we need is to garnish this one."

Jura then turned to the Spartan and smiled.

"Thanks a lot Chiefâ€|with all this food doneâ€|we'll have a seriously great feast ahead of usâ€|you knowâ€|you might not make a bad chef with a lot more practice."

The Spartan merely shrugged and decided to leave for the time being and that left Barnette and Jura to handle the rest while the audience allowed the Spartan to pass as they still looked at himâ€”trying to combine the image of him slaughtering Harvester troopers and other Harvester forces with super-human precision and skill, and the image of him being able to make dishes that were delicious in record time like a master chef.

It was also at this time that a certain video began to play on the screens that got the attention of just about every person in the crew.

--

The women of Megele were all getting ready for the celebration and when they saw the videoâ€”they had at first thought of it being a video of a normal Christmas celebrated on Megele and it seemed that way as they saw a young girl being there with her mother and a young baby at the moment in a quaint homeâ€”the camera recorded them being happy and the women gave comments on how nice it looked and how cute the baby and the little girl wereâ€”that isâ€”until they saw just who the father wasâ€”

A man!!

The women of Megele were utterly dumbstruck and couldn't help gape in shock at what they had witnessed before them and it was obvious that none of them were expecting to see the video of a man and woman living under the very same roof. The same could be said for the shocked men of Tarakâ€”with the exception of Hibiki who had gotten quite used to the idea of being around women for some timeâ€”.even though it still surprised him immenselyâ€”while Cortana merely grinned at the sight.

The only members of the Nirvana crew who were not the least bit shocked were naturally their Talvern allies who were smiling at the image of a man and a woman living under the same roof as they came from a co-gender world to begin with. Magno herself was smirking as she had been one of the First Generation and knew full well how things were back in the old daysâ€”as she dressed in a Santa Claus outfit. She was not the only one as meia looked at the imageâ€”along with Buzam and the others involvedâ€”including Parfait herself.

--

In the Medical Bayâ€”

Bart was not in the best of moods as he ranted on what he had seen while Duero, Hibiki, and Felix were with himâ€”Cortana had very much gone with Dita as she had a plan in mind for the Christmas gift giving occasion and the former UNSC AI had a feeling that this gift in particular was aimed at the young Vanguard pilot.

"That is just wrong!!"

Duero took out some tablets from a nearby container and handed them to the blonde Tarak cadet and then handed him a glass of waterâ€”

"Hereâ€¦some valiumâ€¦take these before you lose yourself."

Bart wasted no time and chugged down the tablets and drank the water and as soon as that was doneâ€¦he gave an explosive breath of release to show that the pills were now taking effect on him and he was utterly happy for it. He then spoke in a very shocked and still disbelieving tone.

"There is no way a man can live with a womanâ€¦"

"So says you."

The Tarak men turned to face their Talvern comrade Felix who was grinning from ear to ear at the blonde cadet's discomfort and shockâ€¦he had never seen such a moronic action before in his life both as a soldier and when he was off duty and being with the civilians of his home planet.

"Where I come from and the rest of my fellow soldiersâ€¦that's pretty darn normal to us."

"It'sâ€¦"

"What?"

"That will never happen on Tarak! No way!"

"Listen Bartâ€¦we're not ON Tarak and what makes you think that there's no way women and men can't live under the very same roof anywayâ€¦in case it escaped your attentionâ€¦you're living with women on this very ship and for me and my fellow men back on Talvernâ€¦the idea of men and women living under the very same roof is not impossible nor is it wrongâ€¦in fact I can wager a bet that apart from Megele, Tarak, Anpathos and Talvernâ€¦there are just as many planets in this galaxy that have men and women living on them as well."

Duero thought about that and had to agree with Felixâ€¦it did make sense that since there was a massive fleet that left Earth during the Colonization Era all those years beforeâ€¦it would make sense that the other ships would have both male and female crews on them as he had seen that men and women can actually live together in the same space and he had been routinely checking himself, Hibiki, and Bart for any sign of the supposed illnesses that one man could get being in the company of women.

"He does have a point Bartâ€¦if the Ikazuchi was part of a colonization mission from Earthâ€¦then it would make sense that there were other ships that were part of the fleet and have no doubt settled on other planetsâ€¦Anpathos had men and women living there and Talvern is living proof that men and women can live together under the same roof."

Bart was still helpless in trying to come up with a counter to all the evidenceâ€¦but Hibiki was uncharacteristically silent for some reason as he was deep in thought and wondered just what was going to be done at the moment after seeing the video of a man and a woman living under the very same roof at the moment.

--

Meia was currently underway to head out on a recon patrol like her commander Buzam she was not a big fan of Christmas all that much and valued her privacy at the moment. As she made her way to the lower floors of the Hanger to get to her Dread, Gascogne called out to her that maybe she should consider celebrating with the rest of the crew for this year.

--

The Bio-Park

The Master Chief observed all the moments there all on the Nirvana and when he heard a bang the battle trained sense kicked in and he rushed to the sight ready for anything except the sight of one of the most odd looking devices he had ever seen, with a soot and dust covered Parfait with slightly frazzled hair and a slightly goofy expression on her face.

"You all right?"

"Yeah but I think I goofed up somewhere with the snow maker."

"Snow maker/ "

"Yeah I was supposed to make artificial snow for the crew inside the Nirvana to celebrate Christmas but this darn thing is giving me trouble again. I won't give up yet!"

"But Parfait we've got less than an hour before the celebration and there's not enough time for anymore repairs."

Parfait's face fell at that and she was not very happy with the news.

"You've got a point there maybe I should scrap it?"

"No you won't Parfait! The celebration won't be the same without snow a Christmas without snow is just plain odd!"

Jura replied as she and several of the women were there on the scene along with Commander Buzam. The ship commander had tried to keep some semblance of order and function on the ship but she gave up as the celebration was the only thing on the minds of the crew and no amount of words from her was going to do much good anyway.

Buzam then suggested a compromise for the situation as she was not in the mood to have a conflict of interest flare up at the moment.

"We can use the comet instead as it pass through space near us the ice tail should suffice."

"But it won't be the same commander!"

The speaker was a woman named Celtic Midori who was always seen wearing what appeared to be some sort of bear costume and she never seemed to want to take it off for any reason. The Spartan wondered just what was the issue with Celtic he had never seen her remove

the costume and since it was a normal costume it would no doubt be very uncomfortable to and hot to be in for long periods of time. Why didn't she take off now and then? Unlike her costumeâ€the MJOLNIR Mark VI that he wore was able to regulate body temperature and was very comfortable to him since he had gotten quite used to wearing it for long periods of time and while he wore the Mark IV the longest of the MJOLNIR seriesâ€this was becoming a close second favorite for the Spartan. He placed that issue aside as Barnette arrived and then the plucky head engineer asked the Spartan something.

"Hey Chiefâ€you know anything about how to fix a snow maker?"

The Spartan shook his head in responseâ€he had received combat training and technical knowledge on every UNSC vehicle and weapon in his many years and was very familiar with Covenant combat systems and weaponsâ€never snow makers or any of the sortâ€thus he would be of little help in the project Parfait had in mind at the moment.

"I'm not knowledgeable on such things Parfaitâ€but I know you can do it."

Parfait smiled and replied.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence Chief! I'll get this baby running yet!"

The Chief nodded and took his leaveâ€he was rather curious on what was Cortana up to at the momentâ€and decided to find her and do some recon work for the time being. As he made his way towards the residential sectionâ€he entered the Medical Bay and noted that Duero was working on somethingâ€a canvas of some sort. He walked over to the Tarak doctor and spoke evenly.

"What are you doing Duero?"

The doctor turned and replied.

"I plan to give this to someone."

The Spartan couldn't help but give a slight smile as he saw just what Duero was cooking up at the moment before his eyes. It resembled flowing snow and in a blue background as well. The doctor had acquired the canvas and the paint brush and coloring paints from the very same section where the VHS castes and dolls were found along with the other artifacts.

(Not badâ€)

--

Dita's Roomâ€

"It's done! This is going to be so cool!"

Dita lay back on her bed and there on the redhead's lap was a very small box that had the words 'Do not open until Christmas' on it at the picture of her there on the box as well. Cortana was there and smiled at the very happy and content redhead.

"I guess you're going to have a lot of fun with giving this to Hibiki

I take it?"

"Yes! I just know he's going to like it!"

Cortana smiled and left the room and headed off to see just what else was going on in the Nirvana and it was then that s ran into the Spartan as John was going to leave the Medical Bay to see just what else was going on at the moment in the Nirvana. The two walked together in silence for the momentâ€¦just enjoying the silence and the lack of activity before the main celebration and made their way to the Bio-Park to witness what was going on. It was then that Cortana looked out at the window and with her specially honed senses saw what appeared to beâ€¦

"What is it Cortana?"

"Isn't that Hibiki's Vanguard?"

--

Out in spaceâ€¦

Hibiki was out in his Vanguard as he planned to get something extraordinary for the Christmas gift giving occasionâ€¦he had decided to get something for Dita as Paiway had told him about the whole concept of gift giving and he decided to give something to the red haired girl in appreciation for all the things she had done for him, it was fair after all to give something back for all the things Dita had doneâ€¦but he needed something that would certainly stand out from normal presents and it was there as he viewed the comet that he had an idea.

As he made his way thereâ€¦he was suddenly informed that something was following him from behindâ€¦he waited for his Vanguard's scanners to identify the unit and was happy to see that it was a UNSC signal and when he turnedâ€¦he saw the undeniable shape of a UNSC Longsword Fighter and then he heard a voice that he quickly recognized.

"What are you doing Hibiki?"

"I was planning to get something for Christmas to give to Dita."

The Spartan was very surprised by that and showed his shock on the matter himself.

"Wait a minuteâ€¦are you telling me you're going to find a gift for Ditaâ€¦in outer space?"

Hibiki didn't know how to respond to the question as the two approached the tail of the cometâ€¦it was then however that the Spartan picked up a faint pair of signals inside the comet and they were not ordinary ones either. He scanned them and found that one of the signals was a Megele pirate frequency and it was Meia's.

What's she doing all the way out here?

The other signal however was not a good one and he recognized it as Harvester Frequency.

"Hibikiâ€¦that present's going to have to waitâ€¦I think we've got

very familiar company."

"Harvesters?"

"Rightâ€|and Meia's in there as wellâ€|time to deal with the threat alongside her."

"Don't have to tell me twice Chief!"

--

Inside the cometâ€|

The Master Chief was right on the money on the scannersâ€|the Dread pilot had been scanning the asteroid when she was suddenly attacked by a pair of long robotic arms and the second that happened she knew that there was danger coming in and that meant that a Harvester unit had beenâ€|however she had been caught in some sort of energy web like a fly in a spider's web and no matter how hard she tried to break free she couldn't leaveâ€|and the dame spider-octopus like hybrid unit was pounding at her Dread.

It was then that Hibiki and the Master Chief showed upâ€|the Spartan guided his Longsword and fired it's rotary guns into the creature and forced it back along with the missiles it carried for space warfareâ€|while Hibiki landed and tried to slice the web with his Vanguard's solid energy blade.

"What are you wasting time for? Put that sword away and use firepower!"

Hibiki turned to face her in his Vanguard and replied.

"In case it escaped your attention Meiaâ€|my Vanguard is not armed with ranged weapons! How am I supposed to free you when my Vanguard isn't even armed with even a decent pea-shooter?"

"Can the chatter you twoâ€|I'll keep this thing occupied but I don't know for how longâ€|Hibikiâ€|focus on freeing Meia and Meia, keep moving so the web can loosen and allow Hibiki to free you fasterâ€|this thing might make a move on the Nirvana so let's take this thing out before then!"

"ROGER!!"

The Spartan knew that this was deadly to the extremeâ€|just like that time in the nebula he would have to avoid the incoming space debris of rock and iceâ€|that was hard enoughâ€|but having to fight a massive foe at the same time made this very risky to say the very least. But he had to buy Hibiki enough time to free Meia and with thatâ€|they could take this machine out without any other complications.

--

Buzam listened in on the information coming through the comm.-systems and she silently hoped that they would do all rightâ€|she had intercepted the transmissions and tried to rally some support to the three but with the crew so engrossed in the ceremony of Christmas there was no time to rally themâ€|



Cortana arrived and when she found out about itâ€|the woman wasted no time and ran into the holo-tank and when she was now in her AI form she began to activate the weapon systems but without knowing the location of the group inside the cometâ€|there was no way she could fire any weapons as they might be caught in the barrageâ€|she hoped that they would be all right.

Dita watched the happenings on a floating lift as she helped the decoration work on the treeâ€|she had been looking for Hibiki to give him her present but the situation as it stood made looking for him harder than mostâ€|she was unaware that bright flashes of light from the comet was actually a battle going on between a Harvester spider unit and her Mr. Alien, the Master Chief and Meia.

She then began to try and find Hibiki as time ran outâ€|only she had no idea how right she was at the moment.

--

Back in the cometâ€|

Hibiki managed to damage the web with his sword and then launched a powerful fist strike to the web and shattered it hard. This freed Meia's Dread and he was able to grab a hunk of ice as a presentâ€|but they had no time as the Spartan told them to move as he had nearly run out of ordnance. The trio moved out of the area quickly and Hibiki and Meia formed into their VanDread form and quickly turned the tables on their foe and destroyed it as the master Chief fired another salvo of missiles to make double sure.

Buzam and Cortana was very worried but were relieved as they spotted the VanDread and the Longsword coming out of the exploding comet. Meia and Hibiki then separated and Hibiki unceremoniously landed on the Nirvana with the ice in the hand of his Vanguard while Meia smiled and left. Cortana quickly left and that made her ignore the arrival of a certain blonde haired navigator.

--

The Nirvana crew were very much relieved and enjoyed the full weight of the festivities and soon the gift giving was going to start. The Talvern crew made a surprise run at the start of the Christmas season and contributed in their own way with a Christmas Carol led by Captain Garret and the Megele crew were impressed by the way the Talvern men and women could singâ€|they were not too bad and were able to do very well despite the time frame they had to work with at the moment. As the gift giving beganâ€|Jura got a beautiful ring from Barnette and Barnette got a kiss and a bracelet as well.

Duero's painting was given to Parfait who was amazed at the gift and felt very happy at the present given to her, while the Chief who had been working with parfait was laughing in her own way, just as the snow machines worked as well as they shouldâ€|Paiway gathered all the pictures she could and write in her diary on all she had witnessed for this Christmas festival.

The crew gathered together and began to eat the Christmas feast and even Meia, Buzam, and Magno were impressed when they discovered that the Master Chief had contributed to the feat before them.

As for Dita and Hibikiâ€¦.

--

In the Bio-Parkâ€¦

John-117 sighed as he looked at the Bio-Park's trees and environments and this brought back memories of his time on Reach. Reach had been his home for so many years that he had forgotten what life was like back on Eridanus and while he had vague memories of his past lifeâ€¦he had long since left them behind and moved onâ€¦it was considered callous but he doubted that it would matter at the momentâ€¦he still had work to do and he needed to do something with himselfâ€¦but for nowâ€¦

"Heyâ€¦thought I lost you thereâ€¦"

The Spartan turned to see Cortana looking at him with worried eyes as she walked over towards him and she seemed to be very serious about something as the two were now side by side and the Spartan saw the massive cloud of snow and ice outside of the Nirvana as the pirates and their Talvern allies were celebrating Christmasâ€¦the Spartan and the former UNSC AI then took a seat on a nearby bench and the Spartan removed his helmetâ€¦the head gear making a slight hissing sound at being removed by the Spartan and the former UNSC AI looked at her companion and spoke.

"You took a great risk to help out there in the patrol Johnâ€¦you could have been killedâ€¦MJOLNIR or not."

"I knowâ€¦but I'm still alive."

"I know thatâ€¦stillâ€¦you know somethingâ€¦"

"What is it Cortana?"

"I never realized how utterly peaceful it is around here when the Harvesters are not bothering us or any other human society around the galaxyâ€¦it's kind of newâ€¦"

John knew just where Cortana was getting atâ€¦most of the quiet times he ever had in his time as a soldier was in cryo-stasis, and when he was out of stasis, he would be in the battle field and was always surrounded by the sounds of battle and the voices of allies and enemies alikeâ€¦this kind of peace was very rareâ€¦almost foreign to the Spartanâ€¦but instead of being confused and boredâ€¦he was becoming adjusted to the peace and felt a bit more comfortable. He then decided to reach for something that he had planned to give Cortana before the Harvester spy unit had distracted him and the others from the celebration. He had made some medications and knew that it was doneâ€¦

Cortana noted than and she was quickly curious as to what was the item that the Spartan was reaching for.

"What's that John?"

The small but very obvious smile coming from the tall Spartan was more than enough for the UNSC AI to get even more confused and eager

to find out what it was that the Spartan had with him at the momentâ€¦and she didn't have to wait long either as he spoke.

"You remember what you said to Sergeant Johnson in New Mombasa when he dropped off the Scorpion Tank when we hunted that Scarab?"

"Yesâ€¦why?"

"You said I never get you anythingâ€¦remember?"

"Yeahâ€¦I do, so what does thisâ€¦you're actually giving me something? Wowâ€¦I never knew that."

The Spartan gave a small smile and revealed the timeâ€¦and it was a necklaceâ€¦but not the regular kindâ€¦it was a locket style necklace and when she saw what was insideâ€¦Cortana gave a slight gasp as she was able to recognize the item inside the necklace.

The item was a coinâ€¦simple and directly ordinaryâ€¦with the symbol of Earth on it and a value written on the metallic surfaceâ€¦it was a standard UNSC coin but it had a slight gash on the middle thereâ€¦a simple coin to just about anyone, one in the trillions issued by the UNSC treasury department in Earth and the Colonies, however Cortana knew otherwiseâ€¦because it was the coin that Dr. Catherine Halseyâ€¦her 'mother' had used to test John when he was merely a young child all those years ago back on John's home-world of Eridanusâ€¦and since she was made from the thoughts and memories of the famous civilian head of the Spartan II Program, she would have no trouble remembering the coin.

Cortana was shocked as she held the necklace stared long at it and then spoke to the Spartan who was watching her the whole time.

"Johnâ€¦this isâ€¦the coin thatâ€¦why?"

"I figured it would be a good giftâ€¦that coin might not be any different from most of the other coins around in the UNSC and even here I wagerâ€¦but this coin started my life as a Spartan and who knows how the war would have turned outâ€¦and most of allâ€¦if it wasn't for this coin and Dr. Catherineâ€¦you and I would have never met you knowâ€¦keep it close as I always have."

Cortana felt another emotion that she had already been familiar withâ€¦but never felt as a flesh and blood human beingâ€¦joy. She wasted little time and placed on the necklace and when she was done she held the coin in her hands as it was in a gold container and a silver chain as well. The former UNSC AI understood the significance of John's gift to her as she had admitted that if it wasn't for this coinâ€¦she would have never known John at all.

The former UNSC AI and now full fledged woman was close to tears at this but managed to calm herself as she still had to get used to these emotions that she had long been familiar with and sensed as an AI but never fully as a human being and with a smile she spoke.

"Thanksâ€¦now I think it's my turnâ€¦come hereâ€¦"

The Spartan was confused but he didn't argue with Cortana in the least as he followed her and they were in the park's forest and then to the shock of the Spartan Cortana hugged him and she spoke in a very happy and sly tone.

"Now it's my turnâ€¦Merry Christmas John."

And without any warning, she kissed him right on the lipsâ€¦making the Spartan react with some surprise at the unexpected actions of the woman who he had been protecting for the past many years since they first met in Reach. As soon as the kiss was overâ€¦Cortana smiled and replied as she pointed to a certain plant dangling on top of the two.

"Mistletoeâ€¦the couple who are below it has to kissâ€¦ No we're evenâ€¦I have to go Johnâ€¦work you know."

The Spartan didn't say a word but Cortana smiled as she could see something that John could never seeâ€¦a faint blush on his pale skinned faceâ€¦and the red color there was contrasting to his full form and his Mjolnir Mark VI Armor. As Cortana left the areaâ€¦the Master Chief couldn't help but smirk a bit as he walked back to the bench and got his helmet and with a sharp hissâ€¦he wore his helmet once more and decided to head back to the UNSC section of the Nirvana to take a breakâ€¦and he wondered just what Hibiki was doing at the moment.

--

In the UNSC sectionâ€¦

"What the?"

"MERRY CHRISTMAS! MERRY CHRISTMAS! MERRY CHRISTMAS!! MR. SANTA ALIEN!!"

The flying saucer that popped out of the box when the Tarak youth opened it had startled him but when the thing began flying about and repeated the same phrase over and over again and then exploded into a toy version of him dressed in Santa clothes and with a wide smile and carrying a sack full of toys and riding a sleight pulled by reindeer and the showering of confetti make it even more interesting.

Hibiki couldn't help but smile at the sight as he took the toy and placed it near his bedâ€¦along with the pillow Dita had made for him. The Tarak youngster had to admitâ€¦this was not such a bad festival after all. He then recalled that Dita had reserved a large amount of food for him when he got back from the battle in the ice comet. And when he was full he gave her the presentâ€¦there was a pair of flower pods in the melting ice and amazingly enoughâ€¦both flowers bloomed instantly and one was a deep blue flower and another was redâ€¦both flowers matched both her eyes and her hair.

Dita was utterly happy with the gift and promptly hugged Hibikiâ€¦making him blush a bit for some reason as she said thank you to himâ€¦

With that in mind, and wondering what else would happen soon â€¦he went to sleep.

--

In the Bridgeâ€|

Cortana walked over to the giant holo-tank where she would fall into and activate the weapons systems, defensive frequencies, and ground communications networks of the Nirvana. As she walked over to the tankâ€|she greeted Buzam and saw the container of various colored food pills and couldn't help but smirk as she had a rather clear idea on who sent thoseâ€|

She placed them out of her mind as she got ready to do her duty and send the Clarion Spy Drones out on recon dutyâ€|but before she did soâ€|she held the coin in her hands and smiled warmly as she stepped on the holo-tank and quickly vanished and reappeared in her AI formâ€|with the coin necklace still on her personâ€|though in electronic form.

Magno and Buzam enjoyed the festivities and were happy that for once in this entire journey they could take a break from their worries and cares and at least be happy and enjoy the blessings they had with them.

--

Unknown to the Nirvanaâ€|

Back in the harvester home-world, things were moving up as the leaders of the Harvesters were looking at a series of images. The images were that of the Nirvana and the VanDreadsâ€|along with Hibiki's Vanguard and the VanDreads that formed the core force of the Nirvana's space borne forcesâ€|but then the images changedâ€|to the images of a certain green and black armored giant of a man with a golden visor hiding his face and wielding a certain Assault Rifle and slaughtering the Shock Troopers and Ground combat soldiersâ€|the most glaring data they had was the fact that there before them was the battle of Talvern.

As the images of the Master Chief played out the Council leaders turned and spoke to one another.

"This cannot continueâ€|this soldier or whatever he or it isâ€|has proven time and again to be a great nuisance. The Harvesting of Talvern should have been completed in three daysâ€|but insteadâ€|.we lost the entire Harvesting forces and the loss of one of our Command Spider Queen has placed us in a serious bind!"

"We can ignore themâ€|there are other worlds worthy of harvestingâ€|"

One spoke out in a serious manner."

"We cannot ignore themâ€|our forces have been defeated by the Nirvana at every turnâ€|we must deal with them now before the rest of the Colonies side with them. The VanDreads will be dealt with in the proper timeâ€|howeverâ€|thisâ€|soldier is the one we must deal withâ€|the combat prowess that soldier has is astonishing and that could help inspire greater resistance among the human coloniesâ€|the Nirvana and it's crews could very well unite the human colonies and they could become too powerful to directly assault."

"You're being a bit overdramaticâ€|"

"He has a pointâ€|it only take a handful of people to inspire others to fight to the endâ€|remember our historyâ€|the Spartans of ancient Greeceâ€|they were only three hundredâ€|and facing hundreds of thousands of soldiers, they held on for three daysâ€|before they were annihilated to the last manâ€|but their example inspired their fellow Greeks to unite and defeat their enemies. The Nirvana's crew may only be a handfulâ€|but they have already won a handful of victories against us and it will not be long before they become heroes and martyrsâ€|they must be crushed and wiped out from the memory of the people of the coloniesâ€|or the Harvest Operation will be utterly ruined."

The Council then talked a bit more about the soon to come counter offensive that they would unleash on the Nirvana that had been a thorn on their side for quite a long time. The Council then turned to a nearby technician who had appeared to give the latest reports.

"What have you to report?"

The tech nodded and replied.

"We have managed to study the newest blood sample provided to us by Rabat that he reportedly gained from the soldier known as the Master Chiefâ€|and the blood cells and DNA show remarkable abilities."

"Remarkable? Explain yourself."

"The DNA of this Master Chief shows that he is already mentally and physically superior to the normal human being and his DNA is pureâ€|no sign of genetic deformities and weaknesses. In simple termsâ€|the Master Chief is the ultimate human beingâ€|one in a literal trillion of human beingsâ€|we have run his DNA profile on all the profiles we have on storage and record and NONE have any similarity to the DNA this Master Chief hasâ€|"

The Council were quickly intriguedâ€|to hear about a human with NO genetic deformities and weaknesses and superior to baseline humans was remarkable and the leader of the Council was very much interested .

"I assume that this is a good thing."

"Yes sirâ€|the blood sample alone will not be enough to fully cloneâ€|but if we can somehow capture thisâ€|Master Chiefâ€|study every cell in his body and his full DNA codeâ€|we believe we can use his blood and body to clone an entire human beingâ€|without deformitiesâ€|since his DNA is perfect in every manner, and is unsaturated and undamagedâ€|he could very well be the key to our survivalâ€|"

"Easier said than doneâ€|the Master Chief is a fine warriorâ€|even I have never seen such skill and ability in my years. He will not be an easy mark to capture for any of our forcesâ€|and I doubt the Nirvana will allow us to take him at all."

"We have the answer to thatâ€¦the rest of my teams have been studying every record we have of the Spartan's combat skills and performances and we have decided to relegate a small number of our Harvester troopers for further enhancements and upgrades and they will be ready in a matter of weeksâ€¦we have planned to deploy them as test be replacements in the coming yearsâ€¦but they might prove useful to the task of either taking the Master Chief alive or dead."

"What about the VanDreads? They have been a thorn on our sides as much as this Master Chiefâ€¦we have lost many valuable space born assets to them and we cannot accept the number of losses anymoreâ€¦the replacement of this units is becoming expensive for us."

"We have determined that the Paeksis onboard the Nirvana is the key to their power and we have developed the needed weapons to counter themâ€¦they are already passing their final test runs and will be ready for combat when the time comes for them to be deployed into the fight with the Nirvana

"What shall be the name of the units?"

"The enemy is called the Master Chief â€¦then the units shall be namedâ€¦the Slayers."

Inside the breeding tanks for the bio-mechanical units which formed the core force of the Harvester's ground forces were a squad of four unitsâ€¦they appeared to be purely made of mechanical and biological parts and their faces were hidden and then the heads of the four units rose and their eyesâ€¦glowing like lights were open.

The Slayers were soon to be unleashedâ€¦and this timeâ€¦things were not going to be easy for all of humanityâ€¦especially a certain ship and it's crewâ€¦one of whom was a very famous Spartan.

--

To be continuedâ€¦

--

Author's notes:

Sorry for the delaysâ€¦had my internet disconnected previously and had to work out some bugs in the computer's power supply gird and internet connection. But at least this chapter is finished and will be part of the saga that is VanDread Halo. To be honest this story has come quite a long way since it's conceptionâ€¦

In fact this is the second longest fic I have dedicated my time to since GunDread SEED and I happen to enjoy itâ€¦.as for today this will be continued and so will GunDread SEED until the end of the story.

The Harvesters are now interested in capturing the Master Chief alive or dead and harvest his DNA and organs because of his genetic superiority and his lack of genetic deformities so they could plan to clone his organs and blood for them to use on their ownâ€¦what does that mean for the Spartan and the war plans of the Harvesters?

And what are the Slayers?

On the next chapterâ€¦The Nirvana encounters yet another deadly situation as they stumble on a vital installation of the Harvestersâ€¦one that is directly supplying the war effort of the enemyâ€¦taking it out would hamper the Harvesters and slow them downâ€¦

But this will be even harder than before and here is where the Talvern soldiers show what they can doâ€¦as Cortana now unleashes new weapons in the fight against the Harvesters on the groundâ€¦.and so do the Harvesters as they bring new weapons to bear down on the Nirvana's crewâ€¦

--

Trailer:

BOOM!!

"GET DOWN!!"

The dust and debris flying everywhere made Nirvana Fire Team Alpha duck as a cloud of dirt, stones and mud pelted the sky as the groups ducked in the trench. The fighting was pretty intense as the sky was filled with plasma bolts and more.

As soon as the dust settled the Fire Teams were bale to fire back and take out several more advancing Harvester Troopers and then they spotted something that made them feel fearâ€¦an armored spearhead of Harvester Main Battle Tanks heading right for themâ€¦the team members looked at one another and wished that they had some heavier ordnance to deal with them. To make it worseâ€¦several unknown fighters appeared in the air right above the Harvester armored columnâ€¦The unknown aircraft resembled old Earth stingrays and were apparently well armedâ€¦

The women looked at one another as three of them were badly hurt and it was not looking good as backup was not going be there in time.

Howeverâ€¦before things could get even more grimâ€¦ a barrage of missiles and lasers came out from the other side of their make shift foxhole, the missiles slammed hard into the approaching armored column and reduced several of the vehicles to scrap while two of the unknown harvester fighters were sent smashing down to the ground in burning heaps.. Kara then turned and took out her binoculars and looked and she whooped in joy.

"ALL RIGHT!! BACK UP IS HERE GIRLS!!"

And sure enough an incoming Hornet came into the area and there was the Master Chief armed with a Spartan Laser got off and ran to their position to lend them back upâ€¦just as the sky was now filled with Longswords fresh from the Nirvana. And to their surpriseâ€¦the latest weapons made by Cortana and piloted by their comrades were now on the sceneâ€¦

The Spartan turned and looked at the incoming air support some were piloted remotely by Cortana such as the Longswordsâ€¦the others were



piloted by the Fire Teams along with their Talvern allies and he began to distribute Medical Packs to the members of Fire Team Alpha and he heard the arrival of the Nirvana's own answer to the Harvester's armored spearhead.

It was time for the Harvesters to say goodbye to another installation.

End of Trailer:

--

See you on the next chapter!

## 15. Chapter 15

VanDread Halo

Disclaimer: I do not have any ownership of VanDread or of Halo

## Chapter 14

Falling Hammer

( ): Thoughts

-----

In the void of space

The Nirvana was cruising along the sea of stars and was busy making it's way to the system that had Tarak and Megele and at the moment the Nirvana crew were taking it easy for the time being most of them were busy doing their usual practice runs and routines and things seemed to be normal ahead of the Nirvana were the Clarion Spy Drones the Cortana routinely deployed to act as the ship's forward scouts and early warning systems should things get too dicey

In the bridge Magno and Buzam were doing their collecting of data while the bridge crew were currently working getting data from the Clarion Spy Drones and the scanning gear of the Nirvana itself at the moment the former AI was in her AI form and was busy recording the data that she picked up from the drones and relayed them to the bridge crew at the moment things were peaceful but Cortana and just about everyone in the Nirvana's bridge crew knew that sooner or later things were going to get hot the very second they thought nothing was going to happen.

"Oh my I feel so sleepy"

Ezra said as she yawned and rubbed her bulging tummy as she felt her daughter kick a bit and she couldn't help but smile at that. Cortana looked at her and smiled.

"The little one sure is active, isn't she Ezra?"

Ezra smiled in response and nodded.

"Oh yes Cortanaâ€¦and she really knows how to make me sleepyâ€¦I think I need to lie down and get some sleep. Captainâ€¦I'm sorry but Iâ€¦"

"It's all right Ezraâ€¦go aheadâ€¦after allâ€¦you need to rest and be strong for your daughter."

"Thank you Captain."

Ezra got off her station in the Nirvana bridge and Cortana decided to help Ezra with her trip back to the living quarters and as the two left the Nirvana command bridge, the young mother smiled as she rubbed her belly and felt her baby react with a slight kick and she looked at Cortana who was very much curious about how the young mother was handling the fact that she was pregnantâ€¦the young mother noted the way Cortana would look at her and she smiled and spoke.

"Is there something bothering you Cortana?"

"Noâ€¦nothing really, I was just curious on how you feel about being a motherâ€¦"

Ezra was about to ask what she meant by that until she recalled Cortana's origins as a former smart AI and realized that since she had once been a computer program before she had somehow been miraculously transformed into a human woman by the Nirvana's Paeksis, and she had never felt the unique feelings of being a pregnant mother. She decided to help Cortana better understand what it's like to me a mother with a soon to be born baby.

"It's an amazing feeling Cortanaâ€¦to know that inside of you is a new lifeâ€¦a soon to be born baby and the child who will be your legacyâ€¦it's a feeling that is hard to explain at times and I will do everything I can make sure my daughter will be given a future."

"I seeâ€¦I wonderâ€¦could I be able to have a child myself someday?"

"Why do you ask that Cortanaâ€¦you already have a human body right? I think you can have a child of your own yourself someday."

"Maybeâ€¦But I know nothing about being a motherâ€¦at least not right nowâ€¦"

Cortana was deep in thought and Ezra couldn't help but feel a level of sympathy for Cortana as she had a pointâ€¦as a military smart AI before in their own worldâ€¦Cortana had been created to handle many tasks needed by the UNSC in times of war and was considered one of the best under UNSC serviceâ€¦but now she was given a human body and could really FEEL humanâ€¦and the idea of having a child of her own was truly alien to her. This made Ezra realize how lonely Cortana was compared to any of the other women on the Nirvanaâ€¦even the women of Talvern no doubt had loved ones and unlike them allâ€¦Cortana had no other place to go.

With that in mind the young mother calmly held Cortana's hand and she

replied.

"Maybe somedayâ€¦when you find the person you loveâ€¦I can help you feel what it's like to be a mother."

Cortana was very much surprised by the offer from Ezra but she could see that Ezra's offer was strong and very sincere. And with that the former AI smiled and replied in thanks.

"I'll take you up on thatâ€¦besidesâ€¦there's already someone I likeâ€¦"

Ezra smiled warmly as she knew already just who the former UNSC AI was referring to at the moment. It was then that Hibiki arrived and with him was naturally Dita and the two were heading for the UNSC section of the Nirvana and Ezra was rather curious as to why that was the case as the Master Chief was supposedly busy in trainingâ€¦she could understand Hibiki's travels there as he had been placed under the Spartan's command and was in truthâ€¦the Master Chief's protégé, but what was Dita doing there?

-----

In the UNSC section of the Nirvanaâ€¦

The women who were part of the Nirvana Fire Teams were currently undergoing yet another fire drill in their close quarters training yardâ€¦a large maze of easy to assemble structures that could be assembled in less than twenty or forty minutes and was quite durable though they did use blanks and laser pointers for their training in what the women of both Megele and the men and of Tarak called the Maze of Deathâ€¦while the soldiers of Talvern had a more appropriate name for itâ€¦the Kill House.

The Master Chief had every intention of training the women to be at the top of their games should there be a battle on their hands and the missions required that ground combat teamsâ€¦The women were there in the Obstacle Course to keep sharp and the rest of the Fire Teams were currently observing the situation in the Kill House through the Helmet Recorders of the two opposing teams.

Fire Team Delta was facing off with Fire Team Bravo at the moment and both sides were armed with BR 55HB SR Battle Rifles, MA5C ICWS Assault Rifles, M90A Shotguns, and M7/Caseless Submachine Guns in the battleâ€¦and as mentionedâ€¦the weapons were loaded with blank rounds and were armed with laser pointersâ€¦the object of the exercise was how to maneuver in tight locations and areas and how to engage threats in such locations and sure enoughâ€¦the mission was to hunt down the other teamâ€¦the last team left standing won the mission.

As the teams split upâ€¦the Spartan observed every movement through the Helmet Recorders and kept track of the situation not just through video feed but with biological scanners in the armor of the participating team members, the armor also had a sensor system for showing just where the laser pointers would hit and determine if it was a glancing wound, a crippling hit, or a fatal one. He was not alone as the other NCOs watched the situation while the other members of the Fire Teams and their Talvern allies were training in their own scenarios as well. It was then that Hibiki and Dita arrived on the

scene to see the fire fight.

As the teams in the Kill House reached the situation where the fight would start the firing began as the sounds of blanks going off were heard and the sounds of shouting were somewhat heard and the situation was turning quickly into a full scale fire fight and after what seemed like three hours was actually three minutes the fight was officially over and the two teams activated the safeties of their weapons and made their way to the general exit and they were now sitting down and talking about how the mock battle turned out.

The NCOs for each Fire Team, Carla and Hilda were looking over each other for injuries and such as they knew that despite being on opposing sides in this test mission when they were hot on the ground they were on the same team and the Spartan approved of that policy as he walked over and slid in the data chip into a nearby monitor and revealed that Fire Team Delta had come out with only one member being able to fight as soon as the cheers stopped as they congratulated each other the Spartan spoke to them all.

"You all did well keep up the performance in the next exercise but let me remind everyone that there will be no competition when the real mission starts we are in the same team here and we all fight the same enemy is that understood?"

"Yes Master Chief Sir!!!"

"All right carry on."

The Spartan saluted them and they trooped off to rest and continue the hourly training sessions before they were done for the day and relaxed back on the Nirvana's crews quarters. The Spartan looked and spotted Hibiki and Dita who walked up to him and the young Tarak teen saluted the Spartan and he saluted back and Hibiki spoke to his mentor.

"Master Chief you wanted to see me?"

"I did I figured it's time you start learning how to defend yourself with a weapon apart from your Combat Knife and the M6G Magnum I gave you let's head for the Armory."

The three left and there they arrived at the Armory of the Forward Unto Dawn and there was a whole row of weapons there for anyone to get and the Tarak teen looked for a suitable weapon for himself and as he walked over the weapons his eyes were now on a MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and then a BR 55HB SR Battle Rifle and he was unable to choose which one he had been trained long enough by the Spartan to know the usefulness of each weapon before him and he knew the strength and weakness of each weapon and decided that he would stick to the MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle for now and hefted the weapon the weapon was not loaded at the moment and was dry of any ammunition and the Spartan looked at Hibiki's choice it seemed his protégé wanted to emulate even his taste for weapons. He didn't halt that as he stepped forward and looked at his student and protégé.

"Made your choice?"

"Yes Master Chief!"

"Good, now remember what I taught you about weaponsâ€|they are part of you now and you must treat them with respect and maintain them properly so they will work fineâ€|treat your rifle the same way you treat your Vanguardâ€|but never forgetâ€|YOU are the weaponâ€|without you in commandâ€|none of the maintenance and care in the universe will matter at allâ€|YOU are the weapon, do you understand me?"

"Sir! YES SIR!!!"

The Spartan nodded and the two were then able to leave as Hibiki was given some ammunition to work with and was told by the Spartan to wait for him in the firing range as he got his own weapon to join his student. Dita then stepped forward and spoke to the Spartan.

"Mr. Green Alienâ€|"

"Yes?"

"I know I shouldn't pryâ€|but did you give Cortana a present on Christmas?"

The Spartan looked at Dita with some surpriseâ€|he had thought the young girl would not ice the new item that Cortana wore around her neckâ€|however, he kept in mind how seriously Dita would hound his student, ward, and protÃ©gÃ© and that would mean that she would not entirely notice the necklace he had given Cortana a few days beforeâ€|and he decided to reply in answer to her question.

'I didâ€|did you see the necklace she wore?"

Dita thought about it and realized that she did see Cortana with a new item in her wardrobe and she gave a look of recognition as she saw how Cortana would fondly touch the necklace and she then gave the Master Chief a smile.

"Wow! You really are a nice alien Mr. Green Alien! I should have guessed that necklace Cortana likes came from youâ€|Mr. Alien gave me a pair of beautiful flowers on Christmas too."

"Really now? Hibiki gave you flowers?"

"Yes! You want to see them Mr. Green Alien?"

"Not right now Ditaâ€|but I am happy for you."

"Thank you! I have to goâ€|Meia's going to have another planning session on the Dread combat formations laterâ€|and I have to be there. Good bye Mr. Green Alien!"

-----

The Nirvana crews were already getting used to having the Talvern men and women aboard though there were some natural difficulties between them as the women from Megele were still not entirely used to having men and women living togetherâ€|even more so when they were with women who were so comfortable with men that there were even casual relationships between them and at the momentâ€|.the women were still getting used to such things.

Barnette was naturally not very welcoming of the idea of men and women mingling together, even after a very long time. But she had developed a strong respect for the Spartan in particular as she had seen him in action more than once. Despite her more aggressive stance towards men she steered clear of attacking the Spartan knowing full well how lethal he could be if he was facing an enemy.

At the moment she and the other Dread pilots were with Meia, Jura, and Dita were having another planning session on their new formations and attack patterns. However while this had been an exclusively female gathering. Hibiki was there and wearing his armor as well. Barnette didn't focus on that as the briefing went on.

Gascogne was also having some time adjusting to the presence of the men onboard. She had struck a friendship with the Commander of the Talvern men as well as a present relationship with the Spartan who would pass by and help out when the need came for his assistance and of course. It still amazed both her and her crew to see the Spartan lift and carry certain supplies that they normally would have used cranes to lift at the moment.

So far the crews were adjusting slowly but surely and the Captain was happy at least that things seemed to be calm.

It was then however that the bridge crew got an incoming data stream. It seemed that there was a nearby system ahead of them and it had residents at the moment. Hostile residents. As the crews began getting all the incoming data. They called the elderly captain and all the key officers including the Spartan.

-----

In the Conference Room

"So this is a Harvester refuel, re-arming, and repair station?"

Buzam asked Cortana as the former AI was in her current AI form and was in front of them at the moment in a holo-emitter that was installed for her by her request. Inside the room was not just Buzam but John, Meia, Magno, Gascogne, and Captain Garret. The Talvern high ranking officer was placed in charge of the units that comprised of himself and his fellow Talvernians. His respect for the Master Chief and his admiration of the Spartan's talents as a fellow Ground Pounder though the Spartan was a holder of a Navy Rank made him refer to the Spartan as Master Chief. Like the rest of his unit.

Before them was a strange facility that resembled an old style shipyard with massive arms and there seemed to small urchin like drones flying about in the area. There were also glowing spheres on the facility along with pipes and more giving the facility the look of some giant multi-armed single cell organism and to keep to the taste of it's apparent owners the facility had some pseudo flesh like covering on certain areas of itself.

"That is correctâ€¦the incoming data from the Clarion Spy Drones have confirmed that the space borne facility orbiting the planet a few light years away happens to be a major center of Harvester activity at the moment."

"Howeverâ€¦the planet below us is very much intactâ€¦there appears to be a breathable atmosphere for human life forms and it seems to be in par with planets like Talvern, though apparently uninhabited at the moment as there is no sign of any human habitation on the surfaceâ€¦no citiesâ€¦nothingâ€¦this planet is similar to the one we had been to when the Fire Teams had their first real ground engagementâ€¦but like beforeâ€¦this planet is quite a lush one. Like the first planet it appears that the Harvesters have full ownership of the surface and have established facilities hereâ€¦namely those that are of importanceâ€¦"

"And geographical scanning on the planet's surface shows that the planet is filled with a high concentration of high grade industrial metals and mineralsâ€¦perfect for repair and construction. Apart from thatâ€¦we've located large amounts of convertible fuel material that's also available to be harvested. And from what we saw of the surface through the scannersâ€¦we can tell that there are mining complexes and refining/processing facilities in several key nodes on the planetâ€¦all controlled by the central command hub and space elevator hereâ€¦"

The image revealed a giant ziggurat style structure that had several large support buildings to it and considering the size of the facility it was no doubt something of grave importance to the Harvesters and the massive tube going upward was no doubt the space elevator used by the Harvesters to ferry the supplies and materials that they needed to maintain their forces in deep space and on the ground..

"Judging from the ion engine trails the Clarion Spy Drones have detectedâ€¦this location is frequently used by Harvester forces in need of repairs and fresh supplies of fuel and materials for their war effortsâ€¦the mining facilities on the planet's surface are all apparently automated and seem to be harvesting a large quota of resources to fuel the Harvester forces in this region."

"Any sign of an orbital defense fleet Cortana? I can bet a key facility that important would have some form of defensive force to shield it."

Meia asked as she looked at the data before her.

Cortana nodded and changed the image from the surface of the planet to the area of space in the area of the planet and there near the orbital facility and there were large numbers of Cube Fighters in the area as well as Seed Ships and Space Urchin ships, but no sign of any larger scale vessels at the moment.

"There is a very sizable detachment of Cube Fighters and Seed ships in the area as well as supporting Seed Ships and Space Urchins so this facility is very much of prime importance for the Harvester war efforts."

"There's also no doubt that considering the material wealth and strategic importance of this planet to the Harvesters' war efforts

and plansâ€|that there will be a sizable garrison in the surface, meaning a fully armed and ready division worth of Harvester Troopers and vehiclesâ€| we have also determined that there are shield generators protecting the installation as well, the only good news is that the Clarion Spy Drones have detected no signs of those mammoth Command Spiders in the areaâ€|.since there is already a working central command center on the planet."

The others looked at one another and Magno spoke to Cortanaâ€|

"How far are we from this planet?"

"We could be there in at least six to eight hours flat if we took a direct route due to the distance between our current location and the planet in questionâ€|.howeverâ€|.staying in the planet's shadow and away from possible Harvester patrolsâ€|we could be there in at least six to seven days."

The elderly woman sighed and sat back and thought over the situation carefully at the moment. Buzam then spoke as she studied the data before them.

"This facility is no doubt key to the movements of the Harvesters hereâ€|and considering the fact that it's one their key repair and re-supply centers for their fleets in this regionâ€|Cortanaâ€|are there any other planets that can support the Harvesters' forces on the off chance the planet is not able to supply them with resources?"

"No Commanderâ€|.previous scans on all the resident planets show mediocre amounts of metals and minerals undergroundâ€|.and any fuel sources are hard to locate thereâ€|the planet we have on our sights is the most viable they had on hand."

Buzam nodded and looked at the data while John thought it over as wellâ€|.and so did everyone elseâ€|they were facing a tough choiceâ€|this location was a vital cornerstone of the Harvester war machine and was heavily defendedâ€|.it would be a great gamble to dedicate themselves to attacking the planet and the orbital stationâ€|as well as the mining complexes and the central command hub below on the surface.

In simple terms they had two choices at the momentâ€|

The first was to ignore the location and move onâ€|.while that was good ideaâ€|.they knew that with those resourcesâ€|fuel and suppliesâ€|.the Harvesters in this sector would be able to continue their operations and many other worlds would be attacked by the Harvesters and many other innocents would be lost in the battlesâ€|lives that could be warned and either told to reinforceâ€|.or evacuated..

The second was to launch an attack on the areaâ€|.destroy or disable the repair and re-arming station and destroy as much of the Harvesters' infrastructure as they couldâ€|.doing so would hamper the Harvesters' expansion operations in the region and slow them down in some fashion as their forces would have to either take longer routes or waste time setting up another location for their facilities to maintain their momentumâ€|.but this was going to be to some degree similar to the mission in Talvernâ€|.very high risk and there was the



fact that they were going to waste a lot of resources on this mission and there was a very high risk of injury or worseâ€¦

These choices had strong pros and cons and the teams had to decide carefully their decisions at the moment. It was then that Cortana had an idea.

"Captainâ€¦do you think that it might be possible we can disable the facilityâ€¦but take over it?"

This made everyone look at the former UNSC AI with some great surpriseâ€¦and Magno looked on with a slight smile.

"That's a very interesting idea Cortanaâ€¦but how do you plan to do that?"

John however had a rather accurate idea what Cortana had in mind at the moment, they had done this before when he and Cortana had rescued Sgt. Avery Johnson, Corporal Locklear, Linda-058, Petty Officer Second Class Sheila Polaski, and Lieutenant Haverson, and then reunited with Dr. Catherine E. Halsey, Fredris-104, Kelly-087, Will-043, Grace-03, Li-008, Anton-044, and Vice Admiral Danforth Whitcomb. He lost good friends in the operation but they succeeded in the mission to destroy a large number of Covenant ships that were making their way towards Earth itself. He had come up with the daring and successful plan and he knew just what Cortana had in mind.

"You want to use a copy of yourself as the new AI we can insert into the Harvester mainframeâ€¦am I right?"

"Right Johnâ€¦we did it before after allâ€¦and it worked well. In this caseâ€¦it will be a different outcome and result."

Cortana then explained her planâ€¦she planned to have an exact copy of her AI form's subroutines as an AI 'ghost' to take over the information network of the Harvestersâ€¦she was designed for such a purpose in her time as an AI and she knew how to make a copy of her AI formâ€¦they were to use a specially crafted EMP bomb that would be used to disable the central command hub and then use the copy to hijack the database of the central command stationâ€¦effectively taking down the entire Harvester Garrison stationed there.

Buzam thought it over and asked a question.

"This would mean that we could very well take out the Harvesters in one fell swoop."

"That's true commanderâ€¦but that also gives us another opportunityâ€¦to get those resources ourselves, once we take over the facilities down thereâ€¦we can use the equipment to gather supplies and resources to replenish our own stocks of materials and suppliesâ€¦and with the Harvesters' own equipment under our command we would already have a working industrial infrastructure to bring the supplies to usâ€¦that way we can be able to get the resources and do it without a heavy amount of time and labor."

The others began to see the potential of the plan. If they were able to take over the harvester complex on the surfaceâ€¦they would be able to gather much needed fuel, materials and resourcesâ€¦and with the manufacturing facilities on the planet that would be under their

commandâ€¦they could very well have new parts and more for ALL sections of the Nirvana's operationsâ€¦and ironically enoughâ€¦the harvesters would be funding their own enemies' operations against them. Howeverâ€¦

Magno asked the question on everyone's mind.

"Will it work?"

Cortana nodded.

"It can be done Captainâ€¦I've had experience with this kind of mission before and I know what the risks areâ€¦but this could be our best chance to use the very resources and supplies of the Harvesters against them."

Gascogne nibbled her metallic rod in her mouth in thought and spoke.

"I have to agree with the logic in Cortana's plans Captainâ€¦we have supplies but with the constant fighting we're in and the need to repair and supply not just the Dread squadrons but also the Nirvana's own needs and that of the Fire Teams, we might run short soonâ€¦and I can bet that Cortana will need to replenish the stocks of materials she needs to outfit the ground teams as wellâ€¦am I right?"

"I'm afraid soâ€¦we have enough resourcesâ€¦but the extra supplies and resources will be welcomed greatlyâ€¦not only thatâ€¦we can be able to trade those spare supplies in case we need food and water. This third option is riskyâ€¦but it CAN be done Captain."

Magno thought it over and looked at Buzam and her second in command replied.

"It's risky Captainâ€¦I'll admit to thatâ€¦but this could very well help us in the long run."

Magno knew that to be true and thought it overâ€¦and after half an hour of silence, in which the crew waitedâ€¦she gave her answer to Cortana.

"Cortanaâ€¦you and John start making the operation plans for the ground teams and get as much supplies as you need. Meiaâ€¦I want you to get into contact with Hibiki and the other Dread pilotsâ€¦I want all of you ready for this operation, Gascogneâ€¦I want you and Parfait to work with Cortana on how to make the program she has in mind. This is riskyâ€¦and dangerousâ€¦but if this can be done rightâ€¦we can strike a blow to the Harvesters and buy other human worlds time to be warned and be ready for combat. And there is an appropriate name for this mission we are about to undertakeâ€¦Operation Falling Hammer."

-----

In the Hangerâ€¦

"You want me to do what?!"

Barnette looked at the Spartan with incredulous eyes as she looked at the number of Vanguard's that were currently being re-assembled,

retrofitted and refueled for combat operations. The Spartan had been given a ton of authority for this dangerous mission at the moment and he had decided to have the Vanguard units be included in the main assault force for ground operations.

He had a feeling that the Vanguard units had a lot of potential. He had observed the Vanguard units for some time. Namely Hibiki's Vanguard and the Vanguard units piloted by Barnette, Jura, Dita, and Meia and felt that the potential of the Vanguard units was not fully used at the moment and now was the time to see how the units performed when given a serious overhaul. He had talked it over with Cortana and she was agreeing with the whole idea as well and decided to have her be the head of the operation to have the Vanguard units retrofitted and remodeled.

The Vanguard units were being given a massive overhaul by Cortana with the aid of Gascogne, the Register crews, and lastly with Parfait and the engineering teams. The Vanguard units were being equipped with a variety of weapon systems and armor that further improved their overall combat performance. Cortana also went to improve the reactors of the Vanguard units to be better in power output and functions. Further improving the operational time window of the Vanguard units and provide power to the DEWS or Directed Energy Weapon Systems that she planned to install into the new Vanguard models.

The Vanguard units were also upgraded with advanced targeting computers and hydraulic systems to improve them and also better armor. Light weight alloys that Cortana had been able to study along with an improved ablative coating to further protect them from energy based weapons and the alloy was strong so it could handle the stress. Cortana also had the Vanguard units' natural carrying capacity upgraded so they could carry heavier loads that were easy to remove and improved booster packs for increased flight.

The UNSC had the original prototype of the first powered exoskeleton armor unit that was the ancestor of the MJOLNIR series and it had been retooled as a support and utility unit to carry supplies and equipment as he and his fellow Spartans outclassed it. However, the Mark I to Mark III series of the MJOLNIR had spawned the Cyclops unit. A powerhouse close combat unit that was rather useful in the UNSC-Covenant Wars long ago in the early days of the conflict. In a way the Vanguard units were what one could say was the ideal form of the Cyclops. And the Spartan wanted to see how the Vanguard units would perform if they were truly used in combat by those who were trained by them. The Vanguard units were being equipped with ranged weapons as well to help them in combat apart from their melee weapons and utility equipment.

The basic weapons were the M41 LAAG which were in a pair on the right shoulder and were on a mount and had the ammunition in a nearby pack that could be easily stored the Vanguard to make it easier to store the ammunition and controlled remotely and fired by the pilot. And then they would have the M68 Gauss Cannon in a heavily shielded housing on the left arm and there were two of them just like the M41 LAAG to add double the fire-power and its tungsten rounds could be stored as well in a housing magazine to ease on storage load and would be fired in the same way by the pilot.

The next weapon was the NA4 Flame Thrower. Designed to deal with entrenched troops. This weapon also saw action in the early years of the war between the Covenant and the UNSC and was used by the

specialized Marine forces known as the Hellbringers. These brave men and women had very high attrition rates but their contributions were heavy as well as they would risk their lives to flush out entrenched Covenant troops and destroy them with deadly precision. The NA4 Flame Throwers would be used by the Vanguards to clear out large areas that could be used by Harvester forces as temporary havens to ambush the Fire Teams. The Flame Throwers were stored in the right arm and the fuel tanks were hidden away and shielded as well to protect the pilot and the Vanguard itself.

The M41 turret could also be removed and replaced with the heavier and more powerful AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun for battles with deadlier targets and could also be remotely fired by the pilot inside the Vanguard and the system could be replaced by a remote controlled Missile Pod for deadlier use on heavy vehicles and air-craft with the missile's tracking abilities. And for more deadly effect Cortana had begun work on designing a mountable version of the Weapon/Anti-Vehicle Model 6 Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle or the Spartan Laser itself which could be attached with the Vanguard for use.

That and the other upgrades made the Vanguards more deadly in combat and would be more than a welcome addition for the Fire Teams and with their close combat weapons they would prove valuable where there would be situations where they could truly stand out.

However there was a shortage of Vanguard pilots on hand. Hibiki was the foremost Vanguard pilot around but he could not be assigned for ground combat operations due to the fact that his Vanguard formed the VanDreads and was a tactical asset best used in deep space combat than land warfare. Jura was a good pilot but the fact that she was the pilot for her Dread which could form into a VanDread that shielded a whole world made asking her for help a bad idea. The same could be said for Dita, and Meia's claustrophobia made her a poor choice for the mission and the Spartan knew of only one person who could serve as trainer and if needed in a pinch. Vanguard operations leader for this operation. However he knew that he was going to have some difficulty in convincing the said pilot.

And he was right...

"Barnette. I need you to help train the Talvern members of the Fire Teams on how to operate the Vanguards."

"Why me?!"

"In case you have forgotten, out of the group that worked with Vanguards in the mission we had months before you scored well enough to be a Vanguard pilot."

"Why can't you ask someone else? Like your student Hibiki for example, he's piloted the Vanguard more times than me."

"I cannot ask Hibiki to be part of the ground operations, as he is needed here to form the VanDreads in case the Dreads need heavy support. The same can be said for Jura and Dita. They performed well enough as Vanguard pilots but their Dreads from the Vanguards along with Hibiki's Vanguard. Meia's in the same situation plus the fact that she has claustrophobia and she is best as Dread Squadron

leader makes her a poor choiceâ€|that leaves just you."

Barnette glared at the Spartan and replied in a defiant tone.

"What if I don't want to? I AM a Dread pilot and NOT a member of your Fire Teams after all."

"That's trueâ€|.but out of everyone here in the shipâ€|you have the qualifications, I cannot ask Duero or Bart eitherâ€|.Bart has little to no experience with Vanguard's and his post as Navigator and helmsman of the Nirvana makes losing him in a ground battle a bad idea. Losing him will leave the Nirvana helpless to attackâ€|I can't ask Duero either, despite his high qualifications as a Vanguard pilot being a military student from Tarak, he is needed here to treat the wounded. As it standsâ€|.I need your help."

Barnette had no idea how to react to thatâ€|.the fact that the deadly and very talented Spartan was ASKING for HER help was unexpected and would have made her smile at the thought of a man asking for help from a woman. But she was still unsure about her qualifications as the trainer of the Vanguard crews.

"Also Barnette, you were recommended to me by Buzam, Magno, Meia and Gascogne to help with this operation. They know you have the needed experience to do this operation and training as well."

"They recommended me?"

"Yes. If you do not believe me then you can speak to them about thisâ€|.but the bottom line is that you are the only one we all trust to help with the operation against the Harvesters. Meet me in the UNSC section of the Nirvana when you come to a decision."

With that the Spartan leftâ€|.allowing Barnette time to think on her answer to the Spartan's request.

-----

Author's notes:

I figured that it was time for the Vanguard's to see actionâ€|.the one thing that grated my nerves a bit in the original series was the one time use of the normal Vanguard's and that was on episode 5 Sweet Temptation. I am a mecha fan and while I loved the Vanguard Hibiki pilotedâ€|.I was not happy with the use of the other Vanguard's and it was only near the end of the Second Stage that they were put back to use.

I wanted them to have a more prominent role in the story of VanDread-Halo in the same way they had been in GunDread SEED and GunDread SEED the Second Stage but not following the same path as wellâ€|.but it was then that I had found out about the UNSC Cyclops.

The Cyclops was an offshoot of the MJOLNIR Seriesâ€|based from the Mark I to the Mark III as was mentioned and was deadly in the missions it was in as a massive melee unit. I had planned to have it constructed but then I figured that the Vanguard's would be more than adequate for the role played by the Cyclops, but with them being larger and more robust than the Cyclops and with the fact that they

were flexible meant that I could take the design further than it was intended. As you all have seenâ€¦these new Vanguard's will now be a fixture in the Fire Teams should they be needed in serious missions.

But they will NOT be the only things I get to work with on this chapterâ€¦.these new Vanguard's are just the tip of the iceberg.

-----

The Spartan oversaw the preparations being made by the crews in his commandâ€¦he had made sure that all available materials and resources were ready for use in the coming operation. This was by far a very deadly and serious mission with no margins for error in even the initial stageâ€¦in order to minimize their impulse signature and therefore the risk of being detected by the Harvestersâ€¦the Nirvana took the long routeâ€¦.this took them a lot longer to reach the system at the time frame of at least several daysâ€¦.hopefully enough time to ready the ground assault Fire Teams and their weapons and the Dread crews for the coming mission.

The UNSC Super Soldier knew that the mission that he and his teams were taking part in was very high riskâ€¦unlike the mission that they had taken on Talvernâ€¦.this was a vital area for the Harvesters and the enemy would no doubt defend this location with all that they could spare at the momentâ€¦.and for a very good reasonâ€¦a resource rich planet like this one was worth the time, effort, materials, and military assets to take over and command to fund their war effortâ€¦

They would have destroyed the facilitiesâ€¦.but such an action would have consumed too much time and resources at the moment and they would ill afford those losses, and the Spartan knew that mounting a heavy assault would leave the crew severely shorthandedâ€¦and for that he was thankful for the Talvern reinforcements that he had with his Fire Teams. The Talvernians were already trained military personnel to they had something of an advantage over the pirates, including those in his Fire Teams as they already were professional soldiers.

At the momentâ€¦the Fire Teams were already deep in training in the firing range and were double checking their gear. The Spartan had also issued the Tarak Assault Rifles and their full loadsâ€¦.the weapons were going to be back-up weapons and were very much useful in key situations just in case either the modified Megele rifles or the UNSC weapons failed as well. He looked at them as they were shooting the targets and nodded to the NCOs of the Fire Teams and left them to do their work.

As he walked over to the training area which had the Vanguard simulators, he was greeted by the sight of none other than Barnette walking towards him with a serious expression on her faceâ€¦.he could tell that she had something important to say to him and she was now ready to say itâ€¦.he was bare of any weapons at the moment but everyone on the Nirvanas knew that the Master Chief didn't need weapons to make a pointâ€¦plus his augmented strength, with or without the MJOLNIR was enough to make him state his point. The Spartan looked at Barnette squarely in the face as she stopped before him.

"I'll do itâ€¦.but don't think I'll agree to being the commander of this operation."

"That's up to the Captain and the Commander Barnetteâ€¦.you'd better hurryâ€¦.we've got at least a week to prepareâ€¦and if the Harvesters catch usâ€¦.we have even less to deal with."

Barnette turned about and headed off to the training simulators and the Spartan merely shook his head a bit and whispered to himself.

"That's one issue resolvedâ€¦.now for the next oneâ€¦"

He then headed off to the Engineering Bay for an appointment with Parfait as she had asked him to go there. The head engineer had recently approached him and asked if there was a way she could design portable shields for the ground teams. The head engineer had developed a fascination to the Mjolnir Mark VI shield system and with the advanced technology they hadâ€¦.she had decided to test the idea of creating a less expensive version of his Mjolnir Mark VI to be issued to the Fire Teams. It was going to be a very ambitious project and was no doubt going to be heavily expensive in time and resourcesâ€¦.but could very well result in great dividends for the pirates and their forces. She had incorporated the designs of their normal space suits and that of the Mjolnir and the Marine Body Armor he issued to the Fire Teamsâ€¦and this project could coincide well with their mission.

If this workedâ€¦.then Parfait could have enough material to create the suits directly and not strain the resources of the piratesâ€¦.and while the suits could not match the Mjolnir directlyâ€¦.it would give the Fire Teams a needed edge should things get too dicey for normal armor. As soon as he stepped inâ€¦parfait arrived and she was tiredâ€¦.very tired.

"Manâ€¦.all those upgrades on the Vanguard's had better be worth itâ€¦."

The bespectacled engineer grabbed a water bottle and drank a good portion of the contents and it was then that she spotted the Master Chief there and she smiled as she finished her drink.

"Great! You made it Master Chief! Are you ready for the scanning?"

"Yesâ€¦.do what you can Parfait."

"Got it! All right crew! Time to get busy!"

"ROGER!!!"

The present engineering staff went to work as the Master Chief was placed on a special scanning unit that the Spartan saw resembled the shield charging unit that he had been subjected to when he got he Mark V and the Mark VI all those months before. But these were scanning systemsâ€¦.the Megele women used this to scan for any radiation contamination on their engineering staff when doing seriously risky repairs on their environmental suits to determine if the suits were usable or had to be replacedâ€¦ Parfait had redesigned

this one to scan the Mjolnir to get an idea of the construction designs that she could use as the test bed for the mass production versions of the said armor though she admitted that there was no way she could fully copy the systems themselves directly.

As the Spartan got into the scanner and began the process the rest of the crew were well on their way. Meia knew about Barnette not being present in the usual Dread squadron meetings and the reasons behind it. While she didn't like the idea of Barnette being absent she could not blame the situation. Compared to her and the others, despite her dislike for the machines, Barnette had the most aptitude for the Vanguards and was by far the best choice to train the Talvern crew chosen to pilot the modified and remolded Vanguards.

She had to agree with the Master Chief's decision to have Barnette as the teacher for the Vanguard pilots and the facts that she was the only Vanguard pilot to spare added weight to the decision as well. They could not ask her since her claustrophobia would strike her out quickly, and while Jura and Dita had the same level of experience they were not to be part of the operation as their Dreads formed the VanDreads which provided the Nirvana a serious edge over the Harvesters in space battles and the same went for her as well. Hibiki was considered the best vanguard pilot as he was the one who used the Vanguard exclusively and was a Vanguard mechanic himself and knew the intricacies of the of the Vanguard but he was needed in space to form the VanDreads.

When Hibiki was informed of the decision, the Tarak youth was mature enough to not argue with the decision. He knew that he was going to be a key player in the soon to come operation and complaining about not being on the ground mission was pointless and besides the Master Chief told him that he was needed with the Dreads and the ground teams needed his help to clear the way for them.

Meia had to admit that the Tarak youth had come a long way from being the rash and hot tempered loudmouth youth that he was months before, it was now true that putting him with the Master Chief was the right move made by the Captain.

As she entered the Dread meeting room everyone there got ready and there was naturally Dita and Jura, along with Hibiki though both women were glomping Hibiki and glaring at one another yet again. She had no idea just how things had progressed this far between the two women and the Tarak youth but she placed that aside for a much better time as she had a briefing to give.

In Barnette's case she was greeted by the other Talvern recruits and she knew that now was the time the Captain, the Commander, and Meia had faith in her ability to train the Talvernians how to operate Vanguards and she had to hurry they will not have much time and unlike their recon mission before they were fighting a well trained, equipped and

-----

As the days passed the preparations were going well as can be expected the Fire Teams and their Talvern allies were now being issued their equipment for the mission and since they needed as much fire power and ordnance as can be used for the missions due to the



dangersâ€¦the groups were really busy to get as much practice as they could in order to be at the top of their games.

The Spartan had outlined Cortana's plans to them and reviewed them carefully and the Fire Teams were very much aware of the high risks they were takingâ€¦they understood that this was a vital site for the Harvesters and their operations and the enemy would do whatever they could to defend the installation zealously and without any regard for the number of units they would have to sacrifice in this venture. And that was the reason why the women and the men of the Fire Teams were going heavyâ€¦.

They were allowed to carry as much weaponry and fire-power as they could use without sacrificing mobility and flexibility. The Spartan knew that there would be no way his forces could go toe to toe with the Harvesters in a straight forward and no doubt prolonged battleâ€¦they didn't have either resources or man-power for that kind of heavy fighting, and they would risk heavy lossesâ€¦they had to lure the Harvesters and trap them in a battle that will allow them to close the gap and use the special copy that Parfait, Gascogne, and Cortana had designed to disable the command center for the Harvester forces.

At the moment the women and men were equipped with the usual assortment of UNSC weapons, Covenant based energy weapons, Tarak issued rifles, and Megele weapons, and the Talvernians used the same mix and their own weapons. The Talvern laser rifle known as the lacer was modeled after an old Earth style rifle designâ€¦the M16A2 and was rugged and reliable and amazingly enough was easy to maintain and was useful as a replacement for the still somewhat delicate Megele laser rifles. And the Talvern soldiersâ€¦both men and women were now wearing the modified UNSC Marine Body Armor and were busy running through their drills.

Cortana had also planed improvements on not just the Tarak Vanguard's but also the vehicles that were going to be used in combat for the operation.

The first vehicle would be the mobile medical treatment and armory center for the piratesâ€¦and it was the UNSC Behemoth-class Troop Transportâ€¦or commonly known as the Elephant in the UNSC forcesâ€¦it was used in the early days of the UNSC-Covenant wars and had served well in those situations where heavy armor, fire-power and endurance was better against speed and mobility. It was used as a mobile Command center and as a repair station and troop transport. It had firing ports on it to allow passengers to unleash their weapons on the enemy when the needs came to that and it had it's own weapon systemâ€¦a mid left AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun that could be detached by the Master Chief and a top right M41 LAAG Machine Gun like the ones mounted on the Warthogs.

The Elephant would be used as a mobile command center for most operations and to ensure that UNSC Marine, and Army forces would be able to reach the battle field with minimal fuss and danger at best. Howeverâ€¦for this missionâ€¦it would be used as a medical center for battle-field treatment for severe injuries and serve also as a spare area for weapons and ammunition resupply as there would be a chance the Harvesters would be able to assault the Pelicans and cut off aerial resupply for the Ground teams. As suchâ€¦the space needed for normal repair parts were replaced with containers for ammunition,

power packs and spare weapons and the modified Elephants were equipped with medical areas and supplies of UNSC issued medical materials and both Tarak and Megele medical tools, supplies and equipment.

Due to the sheer size and weight of the Elephants they were to be brought in by Albatross transport and not by Pelicans as there would be no way the Pelicans could handle the sheer size and weight of the Elephants at the moment and the Albatross would serve well as a mobile command center from the air. However this would not be the only vehicle in the arsenal that would be deployed this time.

The woman had been recently constructing a new vehicle for combat use for the Ground Teams and it was a very useful weapon for the UNSC the SP42 Anti Vehicle/Fortification System Vehicle or commonly known to all UNSC military personnel as the Cobra. The Cobra was constructed with two roles in mind the first was as an anti vehicle system as it was armed with the heavier M66 Gauss cannons an older but highly effective and reliable version of the M68 Gauss cannon used on the Warthogs. The vehicle had a chassis that had similarities to the Warthogs but it was in a half track system and therefore was heavier and more rugged and it had armored panels to deflect solid rounds and explosive shells and nominal protection against energy rounds.

The M66 Gauss Canons were larger and could fire heavier projectiles and at greater speed than the M68 but it had to do them in regularly timed salvos as the energy required to fire the heavier slugs meant that one canon must be fired at a time to prevent damaging the vehicle's systems. The Cobra proved it's worth as a weapon of war as synchronized fire from the canons it had could easily rip through heavy armor with the power to outclass even the 90mm canon of the Scorpion Tanks and in a more agile package but that was not the only valued system the vehicle had as it was not just used solely for hunting vehicles..

The Cobra got it's name as it could deploy special stabilizer systems and unleashed a compact but very powerful 125mm rail gun designed solely as an artillery weapon system. The secondary function did have the weakness of cutting away the mobility of the Cobra but the overall range and devastating artillery fire the unit could bring to the fore was considered a worthy sacrifice when the fighting got really heavy. More than one overconfident Covenant commander had his base facilities wrecked by a concerted barrage of fully deployed Cobras and their tank formations shattered by the Cobra and the long range it had in this mode.

In Cortana's mind this meant that the Fire Teams now had a deadly artillery unit of their own use and with it working with the Warthogs, Scorpions and the Mongooses the Nirvana Fire Teams were proving to be more than ready for a serious battle even if numbers were not on their side.

Another vehicle that Cortana had been working on and planned to field with the Nirvana Fire Teams was yet another vehicle that proved it's worth and power during the 30 year war with the Covenant the MAA-9 Wolverine.

As she had no doubt the Harvesters would have new weapons. She had no doubts in her mind that the enemy would have ground based aircraft so

the presence of a vehicle to support the ground vehicles exclusively as an Anti-Aircraft weapons was a needed part of the packageâ€¦.and she could find no other vehicle suited for this role than the Wolverine. It had proven it's worth when the vehicle proved able to swarm the air with missiles from it's specially made pods to shoot down Covenant aircraft that would arrive and cause untold chaos to UNSC ground forces and even the Covenant were cautious with their airborne assets when these were around. The Wolverines however could also angle their Argent Missile Pods to strike at ground targets though this was used as a last ditch move as the Wolverine was not designed to fight as a standalone unit without proper support from other UNSC assetsâ€¦.be the assets are from ground or air forces. The Wolverine had the XM511 Heavy Grenade Launcher that could be used to deal with soft targets like infantry and light vehiclesâ€¦.but sending groups of Wolverines alone without dedicated anti-armor as well as anti-infantry support was considered as being wasteful and suicidal.

Cortana planned to have at least two of these vehicles ready to lend a hand just in case anti-aircraft support was desperately needed by the Ground teams at some point in the mission. She also decided that even the Scorpion Tanks would need an overhaulâ€¦at least some of themâ€¦.she recalled one variant that saw prominence in the Second Battle of Harvestâ€¦the Grizzlyâ€¦

The Grizzly was a special order vehicle that was used by the UNSC Marine Corps when much greater fire-power was needed for the already deadly Scorpion Tankâ€¦.the single canon turret was replaced with a double barreled turret that naturally boasted a pair of the same 90mm High Velocity Gun and a specially made turret mounted M7057/Defoliant Projector or the M7057 Flamethrower. This vehicle was used to crush even the most determined Covenant formations and forces and proved deadly to the said forcesâ€¦.making the cost in modifying the Scorpion to this variant worth it. Cortana had a feeling that the upgraded Scorpions would play a key role in evening up the odds against the numerically superior Harvester forces the Nirvana Ground Teams would be facing the very second they hit the ground fighting.

As she worked on the machines in the assembly area in the Forward Unto Dawnâ€¦.the former AI wondered on how this situation would play out once everything was on the stage. This was a very delicate and risky operationâ€¦.there was no time to set up a base, they had to attack while on the move and hit the Harvesters hard at the same time the Nirvana's Dread Squadrons and Hibiki's Vanguard would lead the overall attack.

Cortana turned and there was Dita who was carrying a small beautiful necklace and she couldn't help but smile at her perky friend.

"Dita! What brings you here?"

The redhead smiled at her close friend and replied.

"I wanted to give this to Mr. Alien as a good luck charm, but I don't know where he is at the momentâ€¦.have you seen him Cortana?"

Cortana thought about that and replied in answer.

"Try seeing him in his quartersâ€¦.he should be there and busy relaxingâ€¦.he had a heck of a training session just a few hours ago and he's really tired so be gentle with him when you decide to wake him up. Most tired guys are very cranky when they get woken up from what they see as a well deserved snooze."

Dita nodded and moved onâ€¦.allowing Cortana to smile at her young friend as she went back to work on the design plans.

-----

In the Engineering Bayâ€¦

"Hmmmâ€¦.if we can create a relatively easy to recharge and repair power pack system for the suitâ€¦.then we're in business."

"What about the shield systemâ€¦.we can't rely on sheer armor alone Parfait."

"I knowâ€¦.the shields the Master Chief have on the Mjolnir are the Golden eggs on this projectâ€¦..but we'll just have to create a weaker but still useable system."

Parfait was busy running through the design mockup simulations of the suits she had in mind to be cheaper mass production versions of the Mjolnir Mark VI. The spunky head engineer knew this was her most ambitious project to date and would no doubt be something that would be near impossible to design. The UNSC scientists were absolute geniuses in her mind to have created the Mjolnir Mark VI in her mindâ€¦.and she had not taken back her estimation months before and knew that under normal circumstancesâ€¦.there would be NO way she could design something like thisâ€¦.howeverâ€¦.she did have an interest in the armor and wanted to see if she could make a replicaâ€¦.crude in comparison to the originalâ€¦.but worth the effort in her mind.

In truthâ€¦.there were rumors back on Megele that the Government had toyed with the idea of designing power armor suits, but those were scraped and the current suits they had were considered a far better result. But she had no doubt in her mind that compared to the Mjolnirâ€¦.the suits they had were nothing but mere chump change compared to the master Chief's life long choice of armorâ€¦.and she could not blame him.

Compared to the space suits they usedâ€¦.the Mjolnir was the ultimate Armor systemâ€¦.it was highly resilient to damage, it could amplify the strength and speed of the user, it had a self charging shield system that was absolutely impressive, it had onboard medical systems, a fully equipped communications system, a powerful reactor for supplying all power needs, an advanced locomotion system, and finally, in her mind the crowning achievementâ€¦.a core system that could transport an AI. The Mjolnir Mark VI Armor Suit might be frightening at first, but in the eyes of an engineer like herâ€¦.it was the Holy Grail of all armor design. Parfait knew that she would have no chance in replicating it down to the last detail due to several key factors.

The most obvious was the fact that no one in the pirates could handle the sheer power of the Mjolnir Mark VI as they didn't have the Master Chief's genetic and cybernetic augmentations to handle the sheer

power of the system directly, and trying to operate the suit without the said enhancements were tantamount to suicide. And she had the information to back it up as the simulations she had run previously resulted in many of the users who were not enhanced like the Master Chief were all either critically injured or were fatally crippled by the sheer power of the suit itself. she watched those very carefully in order to remind herself of the limitations she had to deal with at the moment.

The head engineer therefore decided to cut away some of the noted Mjolnir Mark VI features in order to make the replicate suits be easier and simpler to use for the women. The liquid metal crystal layer was off limits for her to tamper with. but she could try and use special micro motor systems that they used in the space suits. though they would have to be improved for extra power. The motors would be run by a small computer to interface with the user and allow the user to move the arm and the motors would aid the user as well. This would mean that the suits would have to rely on not just motors in the joints that had to move. but layers of nano-fiber cords in order to provide the artificial muscles in order to provide lifting power and more to the suits.

The suits would also need a fusion power pack system to handle all the core systems and therefore. she would have to design a power system that could be able to provide the power not just for the suit's systems, but for the shield system that she would be able to install into the suit should she figure out a more effective replication of the highly advanced Mjolnir Mark VI shields. The power system would need to operate for long periods of time in the field and also would provide the same level of power for the shields to work at the moment. The woman knew that until she could have all the time and resources that were needed to make actual prototypes to test and use in practice, the power supply would have to be different from anything their own space suits would use and a fusion pack like the one used by the Mjolnir Mark VI would be a good choice as the power system, though a cleaner and more efficient one, thanks to Megele technology and knowhow.

The head engineer knew that replicating the material used by the Spartan to house a ship borne AI would be impossible for her to properly create as the memory processing superconductive weave was unknown and she had no idea on the construction of the system. Thus she had to rely on a modified computer system that she would have to create from scratch in order to achieve a small portion of the functions that were offered by the material that was granted to the Spartan in combat operations and when hacking into computer systems was needed at the moment in the battle field situation. The computer system would be powered also by the new power system that she would use that was modeled from the fusion power system for the whole suit. The computer system would then be able to handle communications medial status, friendly combat updates and more. just like the memory processor weave in the Spartan's Mjolnir Mark VI.

The head engineer then would have to come up with a viable solution to the medical systems inside the Mjolnir Mark VI, the technology was highly advanced and therefore was hard for her to replicate but she knew that an onboard medical system was needed to ensure that anyone of the Fire Teams who were going to be wearing the prototype didn't have to remove the armor to receive medical treatment and leave themselves vulnerable to injury and worse when in the battle

fieldâ€¦.on the chance that both the shield and the armor would fail to block incoming attacks.

The shields of the Mjolnir Mark VI however were the cream of the crop and she needed as much data as she couldâ€¦.the shields were made in such a way that was amazing. Most Megele based shield technology was used on Dreads and their war ships, it was never intended for the use of infantry as the military heads of the planet of Megele deemed their space suits more than adequate to deal with the weapons of the men, though Barnette's previous wound from a Tarak rifle round proved that theory otherwise. The shields of the Mjolnir Mark VI were in Parfait's mind the very first sign that energy shields for infantry squads was a big possibility. However, the complex design of the energy shields and their Paeksis enhancementsâ€¦. meant that there would be no way she could copy them perfectly,â€¦however, Cortana had provided a solution as she told Parfait about how the shields of the Mjolnir were madeâ€¦.she was now aware that the Mark V, the armor series worn previously by the Spartan had reverse engineered Covenant shield technology, namely the arm mounted shield of the Jackal troopers, this allowed the UNSC a basic understanding of shield technology to create the Bubble Shield and the Mjolnir shields.

She decided to have the project placed on ice for them time being and allow herself the time to think the process over carefully and made sure to wait until the mission that they were going to be in was a success and as soon as it was a success, then she would get to work with the idea of creating the pirates' own Power Armor suits that would be very useful for the Fire Teams should they need heavy armor and firepower if they were to head into heavy combat by the bucket loads.

-----

As the crew went to work on the mission before themâ€¦.everyone pitched in as Duero was busy helping train several more of the Fire Team members and the Talvern soldiers on the methods of Emergency First Aid and medical treatment on the field to ensure that the Fire Teams were able to keep each other from suffering fatal injuriesâ€¦.apart from the training, the Tarak medics were also stocking the medical supplies they needed to support the ground teams, the Master Chief thanked Duero and the Tarak teen was all right with the whole thing at the moment.

The crew were all ready by the end of the second to the last dayâ€¦.Barnette had done her best and both Duero and Hibiki watched the whole thing and they saw that the Talvern men and women who were going to pilot the newly completed and tested Vanguards were ready for the mission. Duero and Hibiki had to admit that the newly upgraded Vanguards were certainly impressive weapons as they were now better armored, armed, and equipped by Cortana and Parfait's work. The Vanguards were not as high tech as the Dreadsâ€¦.but their abilities as flexible war machines more than made up for that lack of high tech firepowerâ€¦.and now with their newly installed weaponsâ€¦.these Vanguards were going to be a real handful for the Harvesters to challenge head on.

The Nirvana was already in combat position as the crew got down to initiating the plan that they had been working on for the past few days and Magno was ready for the mission as well as Buzam and the rest of the bridge crewâ€¦.they knew that the mission would be the

most critical they would ever take at this point and time in their careers, and the rewards were certainly looking to be worth the risks. The elderly woman had great faith in her crew and a strong sense of respect for the Master Chief. he had led their forces through several victories already and his abilities, experience, and talents were helpful when the chips were down.

As the crew got ready and the players of the mission were getting ready for their parts in what will be the most risky battle they had ever been in. they took the time to organize themselves and settle into the coming battle. Barnette was with the Dread Squadrons. her task done and she hoped that it was worth the time and effort.

-----

In space

Hibiki checked his Vanguard's systems as the Dread Squadrons were getting ready for the soon to come battle. next to him was Dita's Dread as she and him were going to be the very first to lead the tip of the spear. They were to go in and unleash their VanDread's heavy firepower and support the Dreads and also when they might encounter any threats like the Space Urchins. then he would separate from the redhead and merge with Meia's Dread in order to use their VanDread's combined speed and power to their advantage when the situation called for it to be done and was unpredictable at best. and should they need to increase their forces' defensive abilities, he would merge with Jura's Dread and the VanDread Jura's shield would prove invaluable to increase their survivability.

Cortana would also provide the Dreads with support fire like before with the aid of the Nirvana's heavy weapons and systems and the controlled Longswords, with Bart acting as her support in maneuvering the ship. the two were getting along well as Cortana and Bart, while being in their respective duties would trade stories, with Bart telling the former AI about his world and how he thought of the alliance and of women, while Cortana served as his rival in regards to women though the two were not hostile at all and Bart later said to him that Cortana was certainly someone he didn't mind wasting time with.

The Tarak teen knew that he had to do his part and help with the risky plan that the officers had come up, he knew he could trust both his mentor and Cortana to pull it off and that was what gave him the drive to plan out his own strategies at the moment while he was in the cockpit of his Vanguard. It was then that he was being hailed and he activated the communication system of his Vanguard and there before him was none other than Dita.

"What is it?"

"I was wondering if you were all right Mr. Alien?"

"I'm fine. just have a lot on my mind at the moment."

"Oh I see. tell me, would you want me to make you some hamburgers later when this mission is over?"

Hibiki was somewhat confused at that, this was the very first time he had heard of a hamburger before, and he had a feeling that this might be a food item, the second he thought of that, he was smiling and had a tiny amount of drool on the corner of his lip. He wiped it off and got his attention back to where it was needed at the moment.

"I guess soâ€¦but we'll worry about that later."

"All right! So I'll see you in the galley later! Bye Mr. Alien!"

Hibiki nodded and took the time to relax when all of a sudden, he got an incoming callâ€¦and this time it was from none other than Jura herself, the seductive blonde gave the Tarak teen a very curious and knowing look, one that made Hibiki look at her with some level of confusion and suspicion.

"What is it this time?"

"Oh nothing seriousâ€¦I was just wondering if you know that you'll combine with me soonâ€¦"

"I know that! If it comes to it I'llâ€¦combine with you okay? You happy now?"

"Oh yesâ€¦and I've got some new food for you to tryâ€¦ever heard of deep fried mutton chops?"

The mention of food was naturally Hibiki's Achilles heel and the Tarak teen didn't disappoint and he looked very interested at Jura,

"Not reallyâ€¦are they good?"

"Oh yesâ€¦you'd love themâ€¦plus I do know how to cook a very good set of food items, namely a great Caesar salad and several desert items. Tell you what Hibikiâ€¦you combine with me and my Dread a bit more often and I'll make sure to have those said food items for you to try out when we get back to the Nirvanaâ€¦deal?"

Hibiki thought it over and decided to agreeâ€¦on a condition of course.

"Fair enoughâ€¦but keep in mind that we're on a mission so we'll have to wait and seeâ€¦"

"All right thenâ€¦I'll be waiting Hibiki."

Jura then gave Hibiki a seductive wink and kiss and Hibiki couldn't help but feel a strange sensation hit him right in the guts and he couldn't help but blush a bit for some unfathomable reason. He then placed that out of his mind for the time being as he focused on doing his last check up and was in time to get a call from John.

"Hibikiâ€¦"

"Yes Master Chief?"

"I want you to keep your focus on the mission at all times and be



there to support the Dreads when they need the support and fire power. And make sure to buy the ground teams enough time to sneak into the surface of the planet and begin the attack. We're always vulnerable at this stage and considering the high risk of this mission we need all the cover we can get. do you understand Hibiki?"

Hibiki understood clearly. even with the Longswords acting as support. there was no way for the Fire Teams to accomplish their goals if the Harvesters were able to get the drop on them and attack them when they were vulnerable. He and Meia knew this already but considering the high value of the facilities on the surface of the planet before them, then the protection of the Fire Teams until they were planet side was paramount for the mission's success.

"I understand Master Chief!"

"Good."

In the head of the small Assault Fleet and in the main ship, one of the newly manufactured and supplied Albatross ships that carried the Elephant and the other vehicles such as the newly created Grizzly Tank, the Master Chief was running through the diagnostics of the ships once more to make sure that everything was working the way they should be at the moment. The Spartan was armed with his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle that was in a weapons locker near him at the moment, and a SRS 99D S2 AM Sniper Rifle was also nearby for him to use at the moment and it was in a full combat load out so the weapon was ready for combat use the very second of the ship landed on the surface of the planet. On the back were a portion of the Fire Teams that were ready for the mission while the rest were in a small fleet of Pelicans and a pair of spare Albatross Drop Ships to give the Fire Teams greater degrees of flexibility and power at the moment.

As the ground teams got their gear organized the Master Chief did a run through of the mission plans in his head and made sure to check the landing zone in advance, all they needed was the Clarion Spy Drones to send in the latest combat information on the Harvesters and they would soon make their move. the Dreads would make the first strike as the Nirvana would use the MAC Guns to fire a first salvo to cover the attack. the target was naturally the re-arming, repair and resupply yard that was in orbit so that it would be badly damaged and would not be able to support the orbital Harvester Fleet. as soon as the attack went underway. the Fire Teams and their Talvern allies would make their move from the far side to make sure that they were not caught by the Harvesters on their way down. though he had no doubt the Harvesters would be getting ready to defend themselves on the ground.

As soon as the groups got the go ahead from the Captain as the Clarion Spy Drones gave the information they needed at the moment. the Dread Squadrons with Hibiki's Vanguard in tow made their move as the Nirvana moved ahead and they escorted their ship. and the Spartan and the ground teams. all fully loaded and ready for combat on the ground moved in as the Longsword squadrons were now unleashed and were on their way to support the Dreads and the small fleet of the ground teams,

As soon as the Nirvana was moving into position. Cortana spoke to Bart.

"Bartâ€¦.move to these coordinatesâ€¦.it's time to see how the Harvesters react to this."

"Got it!"

As soon as the former UNSC AI got the data that showed to her that the Nirvana was in the perfect firing angle for a MAC strike she ran the command to load the three tungsten slugs into the MAC Cannon Firing chambers and as soon as she was assured that the rounds were inâ€¦.she locked in and quickly got the firing solutions recorded, double checked, and readied.

"Captainâ€¦.firing solutions are locked in and confirmed! Awaiting orders!"

Magno nodded as she spotted the Harvesters repair facility in space and saw the massive space defense fleet that the Harvesters had on standby to defend the installation, there were Cube Fighters there, along with Space Urchins and Seed Shipsâ€¦.fitting due to the value of the location her crew was about to attack and she knew that now was the timeâ€¦.the Dreads would make the spear attack after the MAC rounds were firedâ€¦.as soon as the Dreads were there and fighting as well as the Longswords, the Nirvana itself would come in and lend fire support to the Dread Squadrons with Hibiki, Jura, Meia, and Dita providing heavy support in their VanDreadsâ€¦.it was go time.

"FIRE!!!!"

The pirates in the Nirvana braced as the MAC Cannons were primed and charged and moments latter the MAC Cannons unleashed their heavy tungsten projectiles and the three high powered rounds glowed from the cannons and streaked right at the Harvesters and their forcesâ€¦.allowing Hibiki to say something sarcastic at the Harvesters just for the fun of it.

"Knock! Knock!"

-----

The Harvesters barely had time to react when the first bits of data came to tell them that the Nirvana was sighted from the dark side of the planetâ€¦.evading their sensor nets, they were about to turn and attack as the tungsten slugs from the Nirvana's MAC Cannons came right at them. The projectiles ripped through several squadrons of the Cube Fightersâ€¦.the fighters were either ripped apart by the sheer kinetic force of the projectiles, or were sent flying by the shockwavesâ€¦. Several Space Urchins are blown to kingdom come as they were in the way or were ripped apart and the Seed Ships in the firing path fared little betterâ€¦as despite their higher level of mass, their armor was no defense against the MAC rounds.

The three rounds slammed into the repair installation and the resulting devastation caused the Cube Fighters and their fellow defenders in space a great deal of confusion and difficulty for a moment and that allowed the Nirvana pirates to hit them hard as trails of missiles and beam bolts from the Dreads were accompanied by Archer Missiles from the Nirvana and the fight began in earnest with VanDread Dita leading the charge and unleashing a large amount of

beam shots at the now recovering Harvestersâ€¦.

The battle in space was onâ€¦

-----

The ground teams in their ships got ready as they began to hit the atmosphere as the Spartan guided the Albatross and their forces to the groundâ€¦.as soon as they hit the atmosphereâ€¦.the Fire Teams braced themselves for the rough ride down and they were not disappointed as they felt gravity come right at them as they were still strapped in.

There was no sign that the Harvesters were expecting them yet but there was no doubt in the Spartan's mind that the Harvesters knew that they were coming and would no doubt get all their available forces on the ground to get ready and defend their key installations and facilities, such places like these are the kinds they would do anything to defend and that was going to be one heck a battle. As soon as the small fleet were clear of the atmosphereâ€¦..he guided at Albatross Fleet down to the ground and as soon as they were in position. He turned and called on the inter-com for all the ground teams.

"All Fire Teams get ready for combat! We are boots on the ground people!"

The Spartan's orders were easily recognized by all under his command as the Fire Teams unstrapped themselves and their vehicles to get ready for combat and it was then that Cortana's voice came on his COM system.

"Chiefâ€¦.we've picked up energy fluctuations that tell us that the terrestrial shields are now online so get ready for a hell of a fightâ€¦.before the shields came online, scanners picked several large groups heading for defensive patterns on the ground areas."

"They were expecting usâ€¦."

"Roger that Chiefâ€¦.John, I don't have to say this too many timesâ€¦..but be careful."

"I understand."

He got into the back and quickly raised his Fire Teams and told them that the Harvesters were ready for them and the planetary shields were active at this moment and time was now against that as the Harvesters would be toughening up their defenses in preparation for their incoming assault. The Master Chief then turned to the NCOs of his Fire Teams and then to the Talvern officers who were charged with leading the Talvern soldiers into battle.

"The Harvesters know we're coming and they know that this is a key sight for their military war machineâ€¦.and they will defend this location with whatever forces they have at the momentâ€¦.this time we have to be the fast moving onesâ€¦.because the installations are too valuable and too numerous for us to destroyâ€¦.we are not going to get any heavy support with the exception of taking out the forces of the Harvesters here on the ground. Let's get this plan into

action."

"YES SIR!!!!"

The Fire Teams quickly got their gear together and the Fire Teams got out their vehicles. the Talvernian soldiers, under the command of their own officers were equipped with their own weapons and gear for combat, but were using the same comm. systems of the pirates to maintain field contact with one another at the moment. As the groups got ready for combat and they were now moving out, the master Chief then ordered Fire Team Alpha to perform initial recon of the area and they were quick on the situation as they were now onboard a pair of Warthogs, one armed with an M41 LAAV and the other was a Troop Transport Warthog and they were moving out and that allowed the others the time needed to get the rest of the vehicles deployed. the Spartan hoped that the initial recon team would be all right.

-----

Out in deep space

The Nirvana was currently unleashing a massive barrage of Archer Missiles and 50mm rounds into space as the Harvesters and the pirates closed the gap. with the Nirvana providing heavy support for the Dreads and Hibiki's Vanguard which was in VanDread Dita's form as the pair worked in tandem to attack incoming Cube Fighter formations and then they would use the cannons when they were on the forearms and acting as blades to cut down incoming Cube Fighters, As soon as the Dreads fought the first wave of Cube Fighters, the Harvesters unleashed their Seed Ships and released more of the Cube Fighters and the Urchin vessels came into the scene and while VanDread Dita was able to take out a number of the Seed Ships and the Cube Fighters. the Urchin Ships used their speed to their advantage to avoid the incoming shots of the VanDread's guns.

Meia quickly saw that and called out to Hibiki

"Hibiki!!!! We need to take out those Urchin Ships quickly!!! Form up with me so we can match their speed!!!"

"Roger!!!"

Dita was not happy with the idea of being separated from her Mister Alien but she was not about to argue at the moment as she and Hibiki separated. the VanDread glowed and was now in the basic pair of Dita's Dread and Hibiki's Vanguard. several cube Fighters were on the move to attack, but Hibiki's training with his Vanguard allowed him to move his Vanguard quickly through the battle and he used the sword of his Vanguard along with the secondary sword to fight with both blades and cut through them incoming Cube Fighters. three were cut down with powerful arcing swipes and two others were cut down with powerful charging slashes. one more tried to blind-side Hibiki but he turned about and tossed his secondary sword and it struck the Cube Fighter right in the eye. Destroying it with one hit.

"ARGH!!!"

Hibiki shouted as his Vanguard was hit on the shoulder but the armor

held and he turned to face his attackerâ€¦.but the Cube Fighter had been cut down by Meia's fire power as her silver-grey Dread came on the scene and Hibiki was called in by Meia.

"You all right Hibiki?"

"Yeahâ€¦.damn Harvester jerk managed to blind side meâ€¦.I really need to sharpen up on my training."

"At least you're all rightâ€¦."

Meia was about to say more but it was then that two more communicatÃ©s came online in the communication system and sure enough, the first speaker was Dita who had a great look of worry on her face, and Jura was there as well and she was somewhat concerned. And naturally Dita was the very first to comment on what had happened at that moment.

"Mr. Alien!!! Are you all right?!"

"I'm fineâ€¦.just a bit banged upâ€¦.nothing I can't handleâ€¦"

"That's goodâ€¦"

Jura also joined in and spoke as well to Hibiki.

"Yeahâ€¦.it would be bad you got into worse than that."

Hibiki had no idea why they were so concerned about him that much, but he had learned to be thankful for the caring and support and accepted it either way, as soon as that was out of the way at the moment, he and Meia wasted no time and created their VanDread and quickly smashed their way through the Urchin ships as the two used the speed advantage to evade the attacks and fight back accordingly when the Urchin Ships tried to skewer them dead on at the moment with their spines. The Dreads took that to their advantage as the Longswords controlled by Cortana loaned their support for the incoming assault at the moment and that was enough to allow Cortana to handle ship defense for the time beingâ€¦.and since the Harvesters had no Boarding Craft in the area as they were not expecting the Nirvana to launch an attack here of all placesâ€¦.Cortana had little to worry about and so did the rest of the crew in the ship, though the Security Teams were ready to respond the very second something bad was happening.

Cortana saw that the Dreads could handle the situation and quickly spoke to the Captain.

"Captainâ€¦.request permission to send the Longswords planet-side."

"Go aheadâ€¦.something tells me that they are going to need the air support."

Cortana nodded and quickly sent the Longswords down to the planet's surface and with VanDread Meia now separating and forming VanDread Jura to create a shield for the incoming barrage of weapons fire from the Harvesters to allow Gascogne and her crew to refuel and replenish a number of the Dreads in battle safely, the Dreads could handle

things from here as most of the Urchin Ships had been totaled by attacks coming from VanDread Meia earlier. The Longswords that were now hitting the surface of the atmosphere were now accompanied by new Longsword squadrons to support the incoming assault and were now on their way through the atmosphere at the moment.

-----

Back on the ground at the momentâ€¦

John was busy working on the formations as the armored forces were being brought in. it was not easy getting the Elephants out of the Albatross Drop-ships due to their size and weight and they were the longest to get out and operational as things were well on their way. it was then that he got an incoming distress call from Fire Team Alpha at the moment, he tapped in and spoke to the voice on the COMâ€¦

"This is Spartan-117!"

"We've encountered the Harvesters Master Chief!!! There's a massive force heading out and we go into a fire fight with a forward element of theirsâ€¦.we've been hit badâ€¦."

"Casualties?"

"Three wounded including myselfâ€¦.but not criticalâ€¦.we're at least six to twelve clicks north from the current location and our rides are totaledâ€¦The Harvesters have got airborne assets here Chiefâ€¦.BOOOOM!!!!....we need backup now sir!!!!"

The Spartan turned and the faces on his crew made him know that they had gotten the same call as wellâ€¦.he wasted no time and saw that one Hornet was ready for movement and he grabbed a spare Spartan Laser and one of the Fire Team members of Fire Team Delta was quick to volunteer and she quickly got into the cockpit and the Spartan boarded the gunship and gave his standing orders for the teams.

"Head for the designated location as quickly as you all can and great ready for some serious fightingâ€¦.we'll head out and get to Fire Team Alpha as quickly as possible and get ready to assault the Harvestersâ€¦.move out!!!"

The Spartan readied his secondary weapon, as the Hornet took off and headed towards the location of Fire Team Alpha's transmission and the Spartan was hoping that they would make it in time to help the Fire Team and get them to be rescued in time, he then contacted Cortana and was happy to be informed that she had planned ahead and sent them a large number of Longswords to back them up at the moment as he had a feeling that they were going to need all the firepower and armor they could get their hands on at the moment and air power was certainly a must at the momentâ€¦.even with the air force they had managed to ready on the surfaceâ€¦.they were going to need the Longswords down here at the moment.

-----

In the location of the ambushed Fire Teamâ€¦

The smell of burning rubber, melted metal, steaming coolant, melted circuitry and wiring was joining the smell of gunpowder as the Fire Team in question were fighting back as best they could at the moment. The Fire Team had been able to make it far when they were suddenly attacked by plasma bolts and they were quickly forced to fight and their enemies came out and there was actually a force of twenty Harvester Troopers that they encounteredâ€¦.no doubt a recon team like they were at the momentâ€¦it was their bad luck that they had stumbled into this trap.

But the training and discipline the Master Chief had imparted on them proved to be a real saving aid at the moment as they fought back and several of the Harvester Troopers were quickly cut down and several more were even run down by the women in the wheels of the two Warthogs while others were sent flying when they were hit by the bodies of the heavy vehiclesâ€¦.however the battle was not over as more plasma bolts came at themâ€¦.forcing the Troop Transport Warthog crew and passengers to evacuate from the vehicle to be better in fighting close quarters and the move proved to be a good one as they were able to evade a massive barrage of heavily focused plasma bolts that smashed hard into the vacated vehicle and the warthog's armor couldn't hold it and the vehicles succumbed to the barrage and was ruined and it finally was blown to shredsâ€¦.some of the women were able to make it into a ditch nearby and were able to escape most of the blast from their totaled vehicleâ€¦.but some were cut and wounded by shrapnel though the armor they had one protect them well and hiding in the ditch helped.

However the concentrated barrage came once more and the attackers finally revealed themselves to the women as another forces of Harvester Troopers came out and this time, they were accompanied by several bands of Heavy Gunner Troopers. The women unleashed their weapons fire while the ones in the still working warthog supported them with assault fire from the M41. The battle was turning very bloody and fierce for the group as they were fighting with all they have as several were wounded as well as their NCO, howeverâ€¦.they held on and unleashed a grenade volley that blasted a good number of their foes apart and allowed them to recoverâ€¦.as the Fire team fought off the enemy, they gained a quick respite and tended their injuriesâ€¦.as they hoped that backup was on the way as the other Warthog was badly hitâ€¦.the metal armor in the front was charred at the moment from the plasma assault that was unleashed on them at the moment.

Howeverâ€¦just as things seemed to be calming down in some fashion, they heard the incoming whistles and that told them right off the bat that they were about to get hit real hard and when they looked at the sky, the sight of the incoming plasma bolts told them that the real battle was about to begin.

BOOM!!!!!!!!

"GET DOWN!!!!!"

The dust and debris flying everywhere made Nirvana Fire Team Alpha duck as a cloud of dirt, stones and mud pelted the sky as the groups ducked in the trench. The fighting was pretty intense as the sky was filled with plasma bolts and more as the bombardment was hitting the area they were in pretty hard. The women were able to stay safe as the smell of ozone and more were everywhere at the moment and things

were getting hectic as the surviving team members tried to patch up the wounded and injured at the moment and things. However, that did not last long as they looked and spotted another advancing element of the harvester Troopers heading right for them at the moment. They managed to patch up the wounded and got ready to fight.

Plasma bolts and bullets flew everywhere at that moment as the Fire Team fought off the incoming groups of Harvesters. they were doing their best despite the hailstorm of plasma bolts that came at them, the fighting was hellish in a way, as there were only seven of them and they were vastly outnumbered, but the women were not giving up and they would not retreat at the moment as they held their line to defend the wounded and to wait for back-up. No one knew how the women of Megele back home would have handled this kind of fighting as this was unlike normal combat for them. the Fire Team however were trained well and their previous experiences under the Spartan told them well on how to hold the line and they knew that back-up would be on it's way.

As soon as the dust settled the Fire Team was able to fire back and take out several more advancing Harvester Troopers, the women were able to see the rest of the open battle field and then they spotted something that made them feel fear, an armored spearhead of Harvester Main Battle Tanks heading right for them. the team members looked at one another and wished that they had some heavier ordnance to deal with them. To make it worse, several unknown fighters appeared in the air right above the Harvester armored column. The unknown aircraft resembled old Earth stingrays and were apparently well armed.

The women looked at one another as three of them were badly hurt and it was not looking good as backup was not going to be there in time.

However, before things could get even more grim, a barrage of missiles and lasers came out from the other side of their make shift foxhole, the missiles slammed hard into the approaching armored column and reduced several of the vehicles to scrap while two of the unknown Harvester fighters were sent smashing down to the ground in burning heaps.. Kara then turned and took out her binoculars and looked and she whooped in joy.

"ALL RIGHT!!! BACK UP IS HERE GIRLS!!!!"

And sure enough an incoming Hornet came into the area and there was the Master Chief armed with a Spartan Laser got off and ran to their position to lend them back up. just as the sky was now filled with Longswords fresh from the Nirvana. And to their surprise, the latest weapons made by Cortana and piloted by their comrades were now on the scene.

The Spartan turned and looked at the incoming air support some were piloted remotely by Cortana such as the Longswords, the others were piloted by the Fire Teams along with their Talvern allies and he began to distribute Medical Packs to the members of Fire Team Alpha, and he heard the arrival of the Nirvana's own answer to the Harvester's armored spearhead.

It was time for the Harvesters to say goodbye to another installation.



The battle exploded outward as Kara and her wounded comrades were brought towards one of the lumbering Elephants by several of their Talvernian allies who were onboard a Transport Warthog, thankfully Kara's injuries were not enough to stop her from doing her key duties and she led the rest of the squadron as they joined up with the armored spearhead which was led by the Scorpions and the small but lethal number Grizzly Main Battle Tanks, the Warthogs unleashed volleys of Gauss rounds and M41 rounds as the Harvesters unleashed their own assault to attack the pirates and halt their attacks the Spartan was in the lead as those members of the Nirvana ground forces who were not on vehicles his battle prowess once more seen as he unleashed hails of rounds from his MA5C ICWS and cut down several more Harvester Troopers and they focused their attention on the Spartan at the moment to finally eliminate him for good and the Master Chief knew that for a fact as several more Harvesters began to focus elements of their ground forces to target the Spartan.

The Spartan turned and fired several accurate bursts on a pair of Harvester Troopers that came at him and he quickly ducked behind several large boulders nearby when a Heavy Gunner Trooper unleashed a hail of plasma bolts at his location the Spartan looked a bit and saw the location of the Heavy Gunner and took out his Plasma Grenade and tossed it quickly and it landed before the Heavy Trooper and exploded the plasma explosion was enough for the Heavy Trooper to back away quickly and The Spartan took the initiative and used his super human speed to rapidly move forward and fire several rounds as the plasma cloud began to dissipate and the rounds he had fired struck the Heavy Trooper dead center and forced it to back away with holes in the body and the Spartan then took out his Combat Knife and with one massive throw struck the Heavy Gunner Trooper dead center in the head the Harvester unit's CPU was skewered by the knife and it died quickly as the Master Chief ran on and with amazing precision took up his Combat Knife in stride and then re-sheathed it on his back and quickly turned to fire another burst of rounds from his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle on several more Harvester Troopers as he was now being attacked by a Harvester Main Battle tank he moved out of the way quickly as the shields on his Mjolnir Mark VI flashed from the plasma discharge.

The Spartan quickly rolled to the left and got up to show the Spartan laser and just as the Harvester Tank tried to turn it was gutted alive by the blast of the Spartan Laser's laser bolt as it sliced through the armor like it was nothing but mere butter being cut by a hot knife. The attack had also sliced through the vehicle and cut down several harvester Troopers ripped into another Harvester Heavy Tank and then through the side of a Troop Transport allowing the Spartan to slaughter a large number of Harvester units with only one shot alone the Spartan then was supported by incoming support fire from the other members of the Fire Teams as M41 and Gauss Cannon Rounds tore into an advancing wall of Harvester Troopers.

The Spartan quickly got on the move and tossed one of his plasma grenades right into the turret of another Harvester Trooper Transport and the plasma grenade exploded making the vehicle reel as it was about to unleash it's payload of troops, and as the door opened, the Master Chief quickly tossed in a his Frag grenades into the Transport and the two grenades exploded inside causing all sorts of hell in the vehicle as the blood of the Harvester troopers inside were

splattered all over the place. The Spartan then moved away as several high powered tungsten rounds from one of the Grizzly Main Battle Tanks finished off the vehicle with only a single salvo of it's dual cannons and then Spartan led the charge as several of the Fire Teams who were not on vehicles came in to follow him.

The newly modified Vanguard's were showing their stuff as they unleashed their ranged weapons on the incoming Harvesters and due to their close combat design they were more than a match for most Harvester Troopers trying to come in close for a more direct attack on them. The Talvern pilots were more than able to hold their own though this battle was the very first time any of them were using a mecha in combat as mecha was not used for such purposes back in their world before it fell to the Harvesters. The Vanguard's were in ways a lot more mobile than the other forces in the arsenals of the pirates and the women from Megele who were piloting a small band of these mecha had to admit that they were really challenged by the machines as they had no idea how to properly use a Vanguard however they had to admit that the Vanguard was perfectly suited for this kind of fighting as their Dreads were near useless in battles like these.

The Vanguard's' added mobility played a good factor in getting into very unique but helpful attack angles as they were supported by the rest of the UNSC arsenals behind them main attack force were the Cobras who were now unleashed their heavy rail-gun artillery weapons and the battle field became a sight of wrecked vehicles and ruined Harvester bodies, the Vanguard's were also able to take a considerable amount of damage at the moment as they continued to mount their assault on the Harvesters

The Wolverines and the Hornets came into play as more of the Harvester manta ray like fighters came on the scene and strafed the ground forces and while the Fire Teams in the Warthogs, Vanguard's, Scorpions, and Grizzlies fired back, the Wolverines and the Hornets unleashed their arrays of missiles and several salvos slammed hard into the enemy as the Longswords unleashed their missiles and cannons at the ground and air forces in the area the Harvester Forces were wiped out eventually though the Master Chief cautioned the ground teams not to be overconfident and they agreed there was chance the Harvesters had another force ready to attack once they got closer to the ziggurat that served as the main command center for the Harvester garrison they were fighting with at the moment.

The Fire Teams moved in and finally managed to reach one of the shield towers and they attacked it fighting through the Harvester garrison there but not without cost as several more vehicles bit the dust and had to be abandoned several of the Talvernians were badly injured and had to be evacuated and the arrival of Elephants was indeed welcome as the wounded were taken onboard for protected field medical treatment at the moment as the rest of the Nirvana assault forces moved in towards one of the shield towers so they could clear the area for aerial reinforcements they all focused their fire power on the shield tower the structure was not able to last long as the pounding came at it hard and the Master Chief took a Damage Pack and fought his way to the Tower after replenishing his grenades and using the Spartan Laser to take out both a Harvester Tank and some Heavy Gunner Troopers who were in the way and he fought with the small garrison in the inside area of the tower and then set charge and the explosion sent the Tower falling down to the ground

with a mighty crash as rocks and dust were everywhere. As soon as the shield was down, they moved out and kept moving forward to the area where the main facilities were located and sure enough the Harvesters had much larger force ready to fight and that force was heading right for them all the Master Chief quickly gave orders to set up a quick kill zone and the Fire Teams got ready to comply as the land before them at the moment would work well as a site for an ambush no matter how hard it was going to be to set up because of the time frame they had to deal with at that moment.

The Spartan was now armed with his Spartan Laser and it had charges left as he waited for the enemy to make their move and sure enough the enemy was coming as hordes of Harvester Troopers came in the battle zone accompanied by Mortar troopers, harvester Tanks, Heavy Gunners and their officer units as well. The Spartan did a quick head count and spotted the incoming Manta Fighters and focused on them as the Hornets were on hover mode he waited and as soon as the Harvesters were in the kill zone unleashed the assault he had been planning.

The Wolverines unleashed hails of missile on both ground and air threats while the Scorpions, Grizzlies, the Warthogs, the Vanguards and the Cobras unleashed their combined fire power as the Fire Teams who were on foot unleashed bullets, missiles, and lasers as they fired at the Harvesters that were coming right for them at the moment just as the Hornets unleashed their missiles and the Longswords unleashed their own weaponry the battle field was filled with missile trails, plasma bolts, lasers, bullets, Gauss rounds, and more as the Harvesters were mowed down but kept on attacking as the Harvester Fire Teams continued to move forward to engage the Harvesters in a leap frog style assault on the area with the vehicles supported by the infantry moving forward and being supported by the mobile Cobras and the Vanguards.

The Vanguards used their jet packs to close the distance and support the main assault force at the moment with their jet packs to attack from both the ground and the air and they were able to engage multiple enemy forces and Harvester Troopers were either swatted aside or crush, or were cut down by the weapons of the Vanguards that Cortana had re-designed from their original layout and function without sacrificing their mobility, versatility and power. The Harvesters resisted and the ziggurat reveals a deadly surprise as turrets came online and fired powerful streams of plasma bolts at the advancing pirates and their Talvern allies the Nirvana forces are beaten back at first by the surprise and scatter to avoid being bunched up and taking fatalities and while many more are wounded in the fighting no losses had been reported.

The Master Chief knew that they had no choice at the moment as this was now the make or break moment as he used his Spartan Laser to destroy one of the turrets and he then moved to eliminate the other and moved through the plasma storm his shields flickering from the impact as he used cover and then as he closed the gap tossed a Frag grenade into the turret's main underside and the explosion causes the turret to suffer considerable structural damage, and the Spartan quickly moved in to take it out and rushed it moving in quickly before the turret could aim at him. He leaped over the turret using his training and enhancement plus the Mjolnir Mark VI and drops his last Frag Grenade into the gaping maw and luckily the grenade was right in the plasma bank and the explosion forced the plasma to leak

out and igniteâ€¦the Spartan had time to roll out of the way and move for cover as the turret exploded.

The pirates used the attack of the Spartan to fight back and evacuate the wounded to the lumbering Elephants while the hornets and the Longsword continued bombing runs on the enemy forcesâ€¦it seems that there were other hidden numbers of Harvester Forces in the area and they were now being unleashed as they began to surround the Nirvana forces.

The Master Chief then contacted Cortana to bring the Albatross Drop ships to the ziggurat and he was told that the space battle was now over and they had won, it was now their turn to hurry and accomplish their mission. The Master Chief nodded as he got out of his cover and fired his Spartan Laser at another turret that was spewing out plasma bolts at him at a rapid speed and was glowing from the massive heat generated by the shots, the Spartan Laser struck home and blew the tting to scrapeâ€¦unleashing a gout of igniting plasmaâ€¦however, the Spartan's shields were drained and he had to hide for the time being to let his shields rechargeâ€¦just in time for a pair of Harvester Troopers to engage him as they emerge from the ziggurat. The Harvesters activated their arm blades and charged at the Spartanâ€¦and the Master Chief went to work in fending them off as he used his MA5C ICWS to parry away the blade of the first Trooper and smashed his knee in the stomach and sent the Trooper a few feet back, a testament to how powerful Spartan was in close combatâ€¦though he knew he didn't have the physical strength of Sam or the martial arts prowess of Li, or the knife combat skills of Fred.

The Spartan quickly uses the butt of his weapon to smash the face of another attacker and sending the Trooper into a bloody heap as it's face was crushed by the strike. The other Trooper aims to take John's head clean off but fails as the Spartan ducks and fires his MA5C point blank and shred the Trooper in the midsection, spilling out the internal pseudo-organs and blood and forcing the Trooper to fall in a bloody heap.

The Albatross Drop Ships arrive under escort and the pirates and their Talvern allies are given a chance to re-arm and heal themselves as they form a perimeter around the ziggurat and then they got ready as the Harvesters mounted a counter attack, the still intact Warthogs, the Wolverines, the Grizzlies, the Scorpions and the Cobras were all in good formation while the Vanguard's provided mobile support and the Elephants took in the wounded to allow for safer treatment and support.

The Spartan quickly gathered fresh supplies as well as replacing Spartan laser with a M90A Shotgun with spare grenades as his shields were now online and he had the pack that had the program made by Cortana, Gascogne, and Parfait, he ordered the Fire Teams to hold the line as he made his way into the ziggurat and moved through the area. He then contacted Cortana via comm.-link to get an idea of where the main command node was for the Harvester forces and the facilities as well

"Where's the main command node Cortana?"

"Scanningâ€¦it's at least three to four floors down Chiefâ€¦watch your backâ€¦I get the feeling the Harvesters are aware you're in the

area."

The warnings proved true as he moved through the floors and found himself being attacked by Harvester Troopers and the taller variants that served as the officers of the groups. the battle was proving to very tight and heavy and he used his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle to handle medium range fighting while his M90A was used to clear out any foes trying to go for a close range hit on him. The corridors had their own dangers as plasma turrets. smaller ones would appear and force the Spartan to destroy them quickly and efficiently in order to avoid getting blindsided as he fought his way through the first floor and then managed to reach the access shaft to the second floor.

Inside he was able to encounter even more resistance from the Harvester Troopers as the floor turned out to be a stasis center to store the Troopers who were no doubt the security detail and no doubt they had not been fully active since an assault on this world was not expected by the Harvester AI. However that mistake was rectified as more of the Troopers were coming to life. forcing the Master Chief to hurry and fight his way through the area before he got surrounded by the enemy forces. he quickly reloaded his weapons and moved through the area as more Harvester Troopers began to close in on his current location. He fought his way past the turrets that came out to pin him down. just like the first floor, the second floor was soon coated in the magenta colored 'blood' of the Harvester troopers slain by the Spartan.

He made it to the fourth and final floor and there he faced a heavy guard of Harvester Troopers and fought them down. cutting the normal troopers and then faced their officers. The Harvester Trooper officers were tougher and he had to rely on a combination of close combat attacks, hand to hand with his Combat Knife, and shooting tactics with both his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and his M90A Shotgun. The officers were finally finished and as soon as he was able to use the Motion sensors in his HUDS to scan for anymore threats, he took out the program pad and locked it into the nearby control port and watched as the data program began to hack it's way into the Harvester mainframe..

The Master Chief watched the computer screen in the main control node as the computer program Cortana had created with the help of Gascogne and Parfait made it's way into the archives of the Harvester data drive and to the admiration of the Spartan, the copy was able to do all of Cortana's hacking functions with 300% efficiency and it didn't take long for the Harvester data drive system to try and counter the program. but the Harvester fire walls were easy prey for Cortana's copy and soon enough the program revealed the words.

"System overwritten. hacking complete."

Outside of the ziggurat. the remaining Harvester forces were suddenly shut down and halted their attacks as their CPUs were hacked by the program that the pirates had been able to make prior to the attack they orchestrated on the planet itself.

The pirates in both the ground and space cheered as well as their Talvern comrades as they saw that their desperate gambit had finally paid off.

-----  
Hours laterâ€¦

The battle had proceeded well for the pirates despite the heavy injuries for the Fire Teams as they were still on the groundâ€¦.many of the women and men of the now co-gender Fire Teams were busy patching up the wounded and salvaging whatever they could as wrecks of vehicles and bodies were all over the placeâ€¦.thankfully though they lost a number of vehiclesâ€¦.they did not suffer heavy casualties and lost anyone yetâ€¦.thanks to the timely support they gave each other to get out of the mess they were in.

Security teams combed through the locations to make sure there were no other still functional Harvester units in the area and used their remaining vehicles on patrols as the pirates sent Parfait and her crew down to make any last minute adjustments to the now converted AI central computer core of the Harvester Command Center. Parfait was happy that the location was relatively intact for her and her teams to do all the work that had to be done in order to get all the supplies they neededâ€¦.the pirates made sure to send several teams of Vanguards out into space piloted by those of the Engineering teams left on the ship as well as several members of the Security teams who were able to learn how to use the normal Vanguards to ferry the recovered supplies from the space elevator that was left relatively intact and functional after the space forces had managed to overwhelm the garrison, thanks to the VanDreads who came in when it counted. At the moment, the pirates were moving large numbers of materials and supplies out from the space elevator's main cargo hold that was also left intact by the assault and apart from the Vanguardsâ€¦.the Dreki was also helping in ferrying the supplies as well, along with the spare shuttle being piloted by some of Gascogne's Register staff..

Magno looked at the reports coming in and turned to Buzam who was coordinating the supply retrieval operations.

"How is it looking BC?"

Buzam turned and reported

"The supplies are being ferried in as we speak Captainâ€¦.and Cortana's scans proved to be correctâ€¦.this world is indeed rich in resources and we could be bale to ferry as much as we can in a few daysâ€¦.hopefully our actions will not reach the Harvesters before then. There are large amounts of metals here on the planet Captain, copper, iron, titanium, tungsten, lead, platinum, gold, silver, aluminum, and more besidesâ€¦.there are also valuable minerals and chemicals that we can use as well for whatever projects and spare parts we need. There are also materials which we can convert into fuel, coolant and more underground as well."

Magno smiled and spoke.

"Now this is what a pirate's haul should be likeâ€¦and we're doing humanity a favor as wellâ€¦.these supplies will go a long way in the trip back homeâ€¦.anything else?"

Buzam nodded as she scanned the reports.

"The planet appears to have considerable wild life and plant lifeâ€¦all of which appear to be ideal for human consumption, wild fruits, animals, fish, sea life, vegetables, grains and moreâ€¦.why the Harvesters would not tap into these resources I do not knowâ€¦.but we can take advantage of thisâ€¦.If I have clearance Captain, I can have the Fire Teams who are all right for duty to go hunting and gathering whatever they can find to replenish our stocks for the kitchens."

Magno further smiled and couldn't help but feel that despite the risks they has takenâ€¦.this had proven to be the most bountiful haul she and her crew ever had underneath their belts at the momentâ€¦.not only did they have metals, minerals, and moreâ€¦.they also found valuable food items and more to replenish their supplies, plus, if they had sparesâ€¦.they could be traded or given to those who were in needâ€¦and they were able to strike a harsh blow to the Harvesters at the very same time.

"Go ahead Buzamâ€¦.take all that we need and make sure to get as much as can be allowedâ€¦.we're going to have even more battles ahead and we have enough room here on the Nirvana for the needed supplies and more."

"Thank you Captain!"

Magno then turned to Cortana and spoke to the woman who was currently in her AI form in the holo-tank.

"Any sign of Harvester activity Cortana?"

Cortana touched her forehead and shook her head in response.

"No sign of the Harvesters yet Captainâ€¦.they will be here so I have posted a small number of Longswords on medium and long range patrols as well as the Clarion Spy Dronesâ€¦.the very second we detect the Harvestersâ€¦.we have to bug out."

"How long will it take form them to reach the planet?"

"If they are in a hurryâ€¦.about the same time we took getting here Captain."

Magno nodded and turned to Belvedere, Amarone, Celtic, and Ezraâ€¦

"We're to remain here for as long as possible until we have gathered all the supplies and materials we can possibly find a use forâ€¦.until then we are to remain on combat standby until then."

"Roger!!!"

"Ezraâ€¦.get me in contact with the Master Chief."

"Yes Captain!"

As soon as Ezra was able to establish contact with the Spartan the Master Chief responded.

"Spartan-117 hereâ€¦.what's the problem Captain?"

"Chiefâ€¦we're not picking up any sign of Harvester activity out here in deep spaceâ€¦but we have doubt in our minds that they know we've hit this place and would no doubt be on their way here with reinforcementsâ€¦there is no way we can fight them at this point and time so we will have to pull out when we have the chanceâ€¦however, we can't leave these facilities intact for the Harvesters to use againâ€¦there's an old Earth term for thisâ€¦'Scorched Earth' I believeâ€¦."

The Spartan nodded as he knew what that meantâ€¦he had read a lot of military history in his day and the history of this dimension's Earth would no doubt be the same as the one on his own dimension.

During the attack of Nazi Germany on Soviet Russia in World War 2 in the years between 1940 to the end on the year 1945, the Soviets destroyed equipment, railroads, farmlands, houses, warehouses, factories, mines, telephone lines, and moreâ€¦this was to deny the invading Germans any supplies, both food and materials, plus housing and resources to fuel their advance into Russiaâ€¦this tactic was old but highly effective as it ensured that it would force the enemy to rely on resources they had on hand and when those ran out, they had to get resources from other locations, which took time and more resources and effort.

This would prove a useful tactic as this would force the Harvesters to gather resources elsewhere, and should they decide to reclaim the resources on this planetâ€¦they would have to spend time, effort, and resources in order to rebuild their destroyed facilities, as well as dedicate a larger and more effective force both in space and on the ground to defend it properly. It would not guarantee a complete victory and they didn't have the ordnance to make this planet truly hostile and the Spartan knew that they didn't have time on their side at the moment so they had to make due with the situation at the momentâ€¦and while it would take a whileâ€¦the fact that it would be a good number of days before the Harvesters came back to reclaim and re-fortify this planet would give them plenty of time to get the traps set inâ€¦they had enough ordnance to destroy all the key facilities that were owned by the Harvesters on the planetâ€¦as well as making sure that if the Harvesters decided to reclaim the resources and supplies in this areaâ€¦they would have to contend with traps that they could and would set up to trap and surprise them.

"I'll have the explosives set up to deal with what we can at the moment Captainâ€¦this will take time, but the facilities will be smoking rubble by the time we are done here."

It took several days in which the pirates and the Talvernian soldiers were able to set charges and explosive traps all over the place and in the meantimeâ€¦the pirates were able to get vast amounts of supplies made. The pirates had to admire the highly efficient automation of the Harvesters' manufacturing facilities and technology as they had to only input the new design data into the computers of the manufacturing plants on the surface and in time they were now fully restocked with all the spare parts, munitions, fuel, and more for the Dreads, Vanguards UNSC vehicles, weapons and more. They were able to haul new rounds for the MAC Guns as well for the Nirvana's main cannons and spare Archer Missiles and 50mm rounds for the Nirvana's defensive and offensive arsenals. Plus the extra parts and



materials were worth the extra time they had spent on the planet's surface. Parfait was also happy for the materials as she could begin work on making her own versions of the Mjolnir Mark VI.

As well as supplies, parts, and materials for their forces and equipment the Nirvana's food stocks were also filled up with meat from fish, fowl, and land animals the planet actually had an abundance of wild life that were herded off by the Harvesters and after testing the meat to see for taste, health, and compatibility with most meat products eaten by the women on Megele small numbers of the animals were harvested and prepared for transport the fact that in a way, they were doing the same thing as the Harvesters made the women a bit uneasy however, they were not the same as they only took what they needed instead of wiping out the animals in the planet. The hunting expeditions were led by the Fire Teams and the Talvernian troopers who were too badly injured at the moment and they were able to use their spare weapons and ammunition to do most of the hunting work, as well as using Warthogs and Mongooses to herd the animals. Apart from meat, they gathered wild fruits in the planet which were all right for human consumption and avoided those which were discovered to be poisonous to them, as well as wild grains and vegetables which were also compatible with human biology and needs. This allowed the Nirvana to replenish their food stocks and were able to do so in relative safety.

As soon as they were able to load as much as they could into the Nirvana's spare rooms and reactivated storage facilities in the old Ikazuchi section as well as that of the Forward Unto Dawn, the Clarion Spy Drones detected an incoming Harvester strike force and judging by the numbers they were apparently there to evict the Nirvana Cortana ordered the Longswords to engage and hold them off for a bit despite the fact that the Fleet was still far away and the delay would only last a few hours but it was enough for the Fire Teams to be able to finish any last minute traps and get their supplies and equipment from the surface they also took the time to get their still working vehicles out of the area and followed procedure to destroy any vehicles that could not be used in battle.

As the Nirvana left the Clarion Spy Drones were able to record the returning Harvester forces just as the pirates activated the explosive traps that they had been able to set up. The Harvesters on the process of deploying their forces when the facilities they had been sent to re-secure had been completely destroyed by the traps left behind, The attack had caught the Harvesters completely off guard and they were helpless as the Nirvana made its escape.

-----

In the bridge

Hibiki looked at the data as well as the explosions and looked at the Master Chief and Cortana as well as the Captain and the Commander.

"I'll be honest about this the minute the Harvesters find out about this raid we pulled and the destruction of all those vital installations they are going to be really after our blood."

-----  
Hibiki had no idea how truly correct he wasâ€¦.for at this very momentâ€¦

-----  
In the Harvester home-worldâ€¦

"THEY DID WHAT?!"

The Harvester Council were in a very serious discussion as they heard that one of their key supply and repair stations had been attacked and raided by the Harvesters and the pirates had been able to steal massive quantities of precious metals, fuel, resources and more from the planet when they were able to override the AI guarding and overseeing the location at the time and the pirates had even the audacity to rig the place with high grade explosives to level the complexes that would take months to rebuiltâ€¦.they had other locations similar to this oneâ€¦.however, it was still a major blow to the Operation Harvest as it would deprive them of one their most resource rich worlds and that was something they knew they would need in order to fuel their war machine.

"Yesâ€¦.the Nirvana's forces were able to raid the key installations on Planet Y-90 and took out a large amount of all available resources and materials from the location and had set up a trap for our forces when they attempted to recover the location from them. The installations were completely destroyedâ€¦."

"How long before we can rebuild on the planet and get our operations back on track?"

"Estimates are at least three to four monthsâ€¦.we do have other resource planets in our areas of control, but planet Y-90 was a major contributor to our war machine in the sector and it will take time for forces in that area to get fresh fuel, parts and munitions, thus hampering their operations in some considerable fashion."

"That is a delay that will prove costlyâ€¦.our war machine will be delayed and that gives our targets time to fortify their positionsâ€¦making it more expensive for us to mount a full scale force for a counter attackâ€¦.the pirates are becoming a much greater threat than we realized."

"More than a threatâ€¦.they are becoming a scourgeâ€¦.we must deal with them now!!!!"

The others in the Council couldn't help but agree with the words spoken, the pirates were at first an annoyanceâ€¦.something that could be easily swept asideâ€¦.but they were more than a thornâ€¦.but a true threat that had to be dealt with swiftly and effectively to finally silence their threat to the stability and power of the Harvester Armada.

They had to counter this situation and soonâ€¦but for nowâ€¦.even with the damage they had sufferedâ€¦.there was still much left to do at the moment as they had other human worlds to deal with.

Namely the planet where they got the supplies for  
skinâ€¦

-----

A day later in the Nirvanaâ€¦

The Master Chief was busy with the usual rounds in the Forward Unto Dawnâ€¦.many of the Fire Teams were currently busy relaxing and the Talvern recruits who were with them were also taking the lull in the fighting to take a break at the moment. He was also taking the time to warm up in the shooting range as he worked on several targets with a BR.

The Spartan then wondered just how things were developing with his charge, he had not seen hide nor hair of Hibiki for a while nowâ€¦.and that was what made him curious, though he knew he was not causing any trouble yet as the Captain had not called him on anything to deal with the Tarak youth who was under his wing at the moment. As soon as he was done with his rounds in the shooting rangeâ€¦.he decided to go and see just what was the young Tarak teen up to this time of the day and it didn't take long for him to find out.

In the moment, Hibiki was basically chatting with some of the Talvernian men and wondered what was it like to be living with women since they had done so all their livesâ€¦..Felix was naturally the guy he talked to since he knew the man more than the others at the moment. The Talvern soldier was more than willing to tell Hibiki what it was like living with women and the young man listened and instead of reacting the way Bart normally did, the Tarak teen kept an open mindâ€¦.no doubt a result of all the training that he had under the Master Chief and the friendship he had with Cortana.

As John watched his charge he wondered just how Hibiki would handle knowing more about women at the moment.

Elsewhereâ€¦

"I wonder just what is it that Dita sees in that guy?"

Paiway grumbled as she took pictures of Hibiki at the moment and wondered just what was it that got Dita so interested in men, namely that one who was the Master Chief's student, she hung out with some of the other men, including the Spartan but mostly with Hibiki, though for reasons she didn't know aboutâ€¦.what was it about men that fascinated Dita so much, and why was she deeply fascinated with Hibiki of all people?

As she took pictures she was unaware that she herself was being approached untilâ€¦

"Spying on Hibiki again?"

"GAH!!!!!!"

Paiway turned to see none other than Cortana who was giving her a very interested look as the former AI was curious what was Paiway's motive for stalking Hibiki and always taking notes as well as picturesâ€¦.while she did find it amusing she was sure that sooner or laterâ€¦.it would result in something that would be considered bad

and inappropriate, but for the time being she decided to find out if the young woman would explain at least a portion of her recent actions aimed towards Hibiki.

"You knowâ€¦you really need to explain to me why you are stalking him."

"I am NOT stalking him!!! I just want to know why Dita is so fascinated with himâ€¦andâ€¦."

Cortana saw something in Paiway's eyes and recognized itâ€¦she was angry towards Hibiki, and she had a very accurate idea on why that was the caseâ€¦after all, from what she understood of the situationâ€¦Paiway and Dita were close friends when the pirates started out and Dita's actions towards Hibiki would no doubt be sending bad vibes towards Paiwayâ€¦she thought over her options and decided to speak.

"You're jealous of his being close to Dita?"

Paiway glared and looked away and Cortana sighed as she spoke.

"You knowâ€¦if you really want to know something about how things are between the two of them and why Dita is fascinated with Hibikiâ€¦I could help you understand."

Paiway looked at Cortana and spoke.

"How?"

Cortana nodded a bit mentally to herself and decided to lay all the cards on the table and spoke as she looked at Paiway.

"Follow me. I think it's time you had a chat about men and NOT in the way your world sees them of course."

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

-----

Author's notes:

Well that's over and done withâ€¦took a while and with all the things going on right nowâ€¦I am happy I can finally call this chapter finished.

It's a lot shorter than some of my other storiesâ€¦but I wanted to make use of enough content without adding too many details that might not work well with the original story so I hope you will all forgive the deal of the chapter being a long one to wait on.

The addition of the new vehicles was a touch I got from looking at Halo Wars and decided to add the information as well. Though I hope the upgrading of the Vanguard's was not wrongâ€¦like I stated beforeâ€¦I liked the Vanguard's in the original VanDread and while the women look down on them, they are actually more flexible than the Dreadsâ€¦Dreads might be the best in space warfareâ€¦and more heavily armored, armed and technologically better than

Vanguardsâ€¦but the Vanguards are flexible, customizable, all environment friendly, can be used for more than just warfare and most of allâ€¦are able to go places the Dreads have no way of moving in.

The Harvesters are royally pissed nowâ€¦with the destruction of their key mining and manufacturing facilities on the world destroyed and taking months to rebuildâ€¦their operations in the sector have hit a snag, a rather large one at that as well, and no doubt they will dedicate their forces to hunting down the Nirvanaâ€¦.

We are now moving to the chapter that most would be familiar with in the old seriesâ€¦which is the mutiny on the Nirvana and the men being imprisoned and Hibiki goneâ€¦however, that will not be the case in VanDread Haloâ€¦ratherâ€¦things will take a much more unique turnâ€¦

How will the people of Melanos handle the appearance of not just Hibiki on their shipâ€¦but the legendary Spartan, who as you might have guessedâ€¦is already getting to be recognized in this side of the universeâ€¦how recognized?

Wait and seeâ€¦

And how will the conversation between Cortana and Paiway play into thisâ€¦wait and see!!!

-----

Trailer:

The people in the Melanos cruiser was looking at both Hibiki and John, they couldn't help but stare as Hibiki carried his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and wearing his custom made Marine Body Armorâ€¦Hibiki was a bit unnerved to see the people as they were all paleâ€¦though being with the Master Chief when he was out of armor made him a bit more used to the sight of pale skinned people.

However the rumors were already circulating the moment the people saw the Spartan who was moving along with his protÃ©gÃ©.

"Is that him?"

"Is that really a Spartan?"

"I heard he fought ten Harvester Trooper by himselfâ€¦and killed them all!!!"

"No way!!!"

"It's the truth I swear!!!"

"You think that's amazingâ€¦I heard he's able to punch so hard, he could splatter his enemy's face with one hit!!!"

"Ouchâ€¦."

"He so tallâ€¦."

"What kind of armor is that?"

Hibiki couldn't help but smirk a bit and look at his mentor and commanding officer.

"You're pretty popular on this side of the universe Chief!!"

The Spartan merely shrugged, though he was rather curious on how these people knew him

-----

Have fun!!!

## 16. Chapter 16

VanDread " Halo

Disclaimer: I do not own either VanDread or Halo. the first is owned by GONZO and the other is owned by Bungie.

## Chapter 15

Separated

( ): Thoughts

-----

In the Nirvana's Engineering Bay

Parfait wiped the sweat off her face and placed aside her tool box and looked over the machine in front of her and she couldn't help but smile at the sight.

"Thank the Goddess that we've fixed that bug."

The second in command of the Nirvana's Engineering Teams looked over the machine that Parfait and her teams had been working on for the past few weeks and it was certainly impressive looking but she still had some doubts about it.

"It's almost ready, but we still need to test a lot of things Parfait."

"I know. but the first batch is finished and we can test them when time is on our side."

The machine they spoke of was Parfait's first creation of Power Armor for the Megele pirates and their Talvern allies. It had been expensive in parts, resources, and time, but in her mind it would be worth the investments and she had to admit that it was certainly a good looking and powerful piece of work.

It was about eight feet tall and that was about the very same height as that of the Master Chief's own Mjolnir Mark VI but was somewhat bulkier due to the fact that it was only following the basic design principles of the Mjolnir but not all the technological details and systems. The first was that the suit relied on specially made motors and smaller servos to move the limbs as there was no way to copy the

Reactive Metal Liquid Crystal Layer, the system in question was too reactive and could and would critically injure normal people.

However, Parfait worked around the problem well enough as the Megele engineer was able to downscale the motors and servos to a much smaller sizeâ€making them less bulky and easier to fit into the suit. The servos would be easily programmed with special function settings via computer so it would be able to match up with the normal reflexes of the person wearing the suit, and with the downscaled motors, it was a lot easier than fitting big ones into the system which would have made the suit too bulky for normal operations. The suit also had special nano-fiber muscles that could serve to increase the strength of the suit and give it an even greater lifting capacity as well as speed. The suit's build in medical scanners would also inject special medication into the user to keep the user alive and conscious for the time until medical treatment was possible. Parfait had to squeeze as much of these features as she could manage and made the suit very effective, though not in the same fashion as that of the Master Chief's Mjolnir Armor as the UNSC created suit was very advanced and it was also enhanced by the Paeksis to be much stronger than it was originally made for.

Another feature was the power supply. The head engineer was able to find a suitable power source and it was a cold fusion power reactor that provided clean and reliable energy to the suit and the rest of it's key systems for combat and due to the power source it could be operational for longer periods of time, and the power source could be used to power some of the new weapons Parfait had in mind to supplement the suits.

The installed AI program in the suit's CPU could be custom programmed by the users as well as having a basic but versatile default program to work with and could be accessed by the HMDS and that would allow the user to make on the spot changes and it could also be programmed by external connections by a laptop when the user was not inside of the suit to operate it.

The suit was also able to carry stores of ammunition and supplies should the user need them as Parfait and the other engineers were able to fit in magnetic plates in order to carry weapons and supplies into the battle field, as well as hidden pouches to allow for better access to the said supplies and ammunition.

The shields however on the suits were Parfait's best workâ€..she had studied the two shielding system they had to work with, the Mjolnir Mark VI's shields and the Bubble Shield system, the Mjolnir Shields and the Bubble Shield were too complicated to easily replicate and they did have weak points, the Mjolnir' shields were vulnerable to ballistic fire and energy based weaponry, and the Bubble Shield was an immobile system and it could be passed by slow moving objects. However that would not deter the head engineer and mechanical whiz of the pirates as she was able to study them well and devise workable prototypes that she had been working on for a number of weeks, until she was able to create a good version that she installed into the suits that she and the other engineers had been able to make.

She found a way to create shields that had the same qualities of both shield systems but still was mobile, she got the designs and also incorporated the design plans of the Megele Dreads' own shielding

system which could handle both solid and energy impacts. The technology of Megele was better than that of the men of Tarak, but it was not as versatile and it was with the studies she had on the technology of the UNSC and Tarak that she came up with the shield system. It was not as long lasting as the shields of the Mjolnir Mark VI, meaning that they were only half as much as the shields, but it made due with a much faster charge rate and was a lot tougher.

In order to make due for the lowered shield energy length, the suits were able to copy the armor of the Mjolnir Mark VI by having slimmer but denser plates of heavily laminated titanium alloy and that gave the suits good protection from basic ballistic and energy weapons fire. The armor had been thoroughly tested by Parfait and her engineering staff and it was found to be the best form of armor for the suits as they were not easily weighed down by heavy armor plating. The light weight titanium helped greatly as well as the other metals and resources that they were able to get from the planet formerly used by the Harvesters.

Had this project been done without the supplies, parts, technology, data and resources then Parfait could have bet that it would have been extremely expensive for the whole engineering crew and her to make and would have been tossed aside for the moment.

The Suits were small in number at the moment and the Nirvana only had ten of these suits in their arsenals and Parfait was able to study more UNSC technology and weaponry to add some special punch to the suits. The first was following the design of the Stanchion Gauss Rifle that first saw action during the rescue of the people of Talvern months before. She had been impressed by the rifle in action and decided to integrate the weapon with the suit, and that was done by having the laptop's programming to be fitted into the HMDS of the suit. This allowed the user to do the calculations required to make precise shots on key targets and with the suit, it was mobile and also had a better protection rating.

She also decided to create a portable version of the M68 Gauss Cannon used by the Warthogs. This mobile Gauss Canon would be very valuable in bringing heavy ordnance into combat where the users of the suit could be able to help support vehicles and infantry with heavy power and it would be able to use the power from the Suit's cold fusion reactor to power it as well. This was perfect for key battles where the Warthogs might not be enough to get to a battle zone in time.

For assault purposes, Parfait knew that there was little chance the suits could carry normal weapons as the hands were too big and thus she had to find ways to create other weapons, but for now she was able to use another weapon in the UNSC arsenal to help out, the M247 General Purpose Machine Gun, namely the Squad Assault Weapon version. The weapon had been superseded by the AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun and the heavy weapon would have been a good choice, but Parfait decided against it as the weapon was too big and the heavy amounts of rounds could weigh the suit down. Thus the M247 was a much better choice and with the suit providing greater carrying capacity and with some modifications to the M247 itself, the box magazines were replaced with the drum magazines, allowing for greater amounts of ammunition to be carried.

Parfait still had to make energy based weapons for the suits but that



could wait for the time being and she couldn't help but feel very happy with the initial results.

"These suits are going to go a very long way in helping us beat the Harvesters."

"But we still need to test them in a real obstacle course as well as other environments to make sure that they are really ready for combat and I doubt that we can do it on the Nirvana, there isn't enough room and space for them."

Parfait nodded as she still needed more data on how the suits would perform in combat. They were powerful but were not good choices for ship security as they were too heavy and the weapons that were made for them were too powerful to be used in the ship for defense and were limited to ground operations, though she had a feeling she could modify that with extra time on her hands.

"The best way we can do that is if the Master Chief and the Ground Teams land on a planet for training. That's the best time we have for making the needed changes of modifications. Man, who would have thought we'd own our own suits of Power Armor now? Many people back home would have never bothered with the idea."

Chief nodded with Parfait. The idea of Powered Assault Armor for Infantry never took off in Megele, but considering the extreme dangers of the battles they were in with the Harvesters, these suits would become prime combat gear for them all. They still need to do some more field testing and also some extra studying on how to create and perfect any new weapons that could be added to the arsenals of the suits.

-----

In the Medical Bay

Hibiki was currently getting his latest physical with Duero handling the tests as Paiway was busy checking up on the Medical Bay's supplies of medicine and other tools, as Duero took a blood sample from Hibiki, the Tarak teen merely made a slight hiss at the pain and as it was over, took the time to rub his arm where the blood sample was taken.

"I'll never get used to that."

"You should, it's the best way to keep track of one's health."

"I know. So how are things with you Duero?"

"Pretty good, so far this trip has been very interesting, I have been learning as much as I can about the true nature of women and also learning just how to heal them, they might be human despite their differences from us in an outward sense, but their bodies are different in some areas that I have yet to understand more fully, what's your plan for today Hibiki?"

The Tarak teen thought about it and recalled that Dita had asked him to help her with some sort of cooking errand.

"Dita's got me to helping her cook some sort of special meal, I

personally have no idea why, but for some reason she's a lot perkier on this day."

Duero thought about it and gave his thoughts on the matter.

"Maybe she's planning a surprise for someone; you know how Dita would love to make surprises anyway."

"I guessâ€¦.well then I think I should help her, she did ask for my help after all, anyway, I have to get going before she starts looking for me again."

As soon as Hibiki had gone, and Paiway was done with her duties, the precocious eleven year old girl was able to finish her duties in the Medical bay, she quickly followed Hibiki, no doubt to do another Pai check, but she was very curious about what the two men had been talking about and she was the one who knew just what this day was, to both Dita and her.

This was the day of their joining the pirates and both friends had been celebrating this for years, but it seems that Hibiki was now the object of Dita's affections and despite not showing it, she was jealous of the attention Dita showered on Hibiki and she wanted to know if Dita had forgotten her, however she was thinking differently at the moment as she recalled a conversation she had with Cortanaâ€¦|

-----

Flashbackâ€¦|.

Paiway was sitting down in front of Cortana as the former UNSC Ai and the young nurse were having the chat that Cortana had promised. The young Megele nurse listened to Cortana explain about how men and women actually got along with one another how to tell the signs properly and it was somewhat surprising for Paiway to hear about all this.

Cortana had the information of male and female relationships as most AI did, though that was only something that was considered standard procedure, however since she was cloned from Dr Catherine E, Halsey she had a far more open mind to thingsâ€¦|.namely when it concerned Johnâ€¦|.Dr. Catherine always had a soft spot for the Master Chief and this fact allowed Cortana to explore human emotions and thoughts. Plus she was able to spend time with Dita and observe the relationship between the two of them, and she could see that the relationship had grown a great deal since it started out and now she wanted to make sure that Paiway would understand.

"You mean to tell me that Dita LIKES him!"

"Yesâ€¦|.though how far that has come, I can't really say, all I know is that Dita likes Hibiki a great deal, and compared to how he was back thenâ€¦|.he's certainly matured."

"I guessâ€¦|.but are you saying that Dita could beâ€¦|.liking the man even more now?"

"Yesâ€¦|.though like I said, I can't be sure how far that has come. Listen Paiwayâ€¦|.I know that what I told you about men and women

being together is alien to you, but that is a truth, hard to accept, but it's thereâ€¦"

"But why him? And she always wants to know more about him, why can't she just accept that he's a man and that's it?"

Cortana sighed and spoke.

"That is where things can be different, men are different from women and vice versaâ€¦.Paiway, just because you're world views men differently does not mean that all men are like that. They areâ€¦.kind of like onions in a sense."

"Since when are men onions?"

"That's the figure of speechâ€¦.when you cut an onion, there are different layers, and that is what a man is, once you get past the first skin, you can really see what they are inside.. Let me say thisâ€¦.you know how I met John when I was still an AI?"

"How?"

Cortana grinned and replied.

"When I was still an AI back on Reach, I was shown pictures of the Spartans and I read all of their profiles, John was strong, swift, and brave, a natural born leader, I even called him attractiveâ€¦in a primitive animal sort of wayâ€¦trust me, I managed to get a blush out of my mother/creator Dr. Catherine when I said that. But do you know what I saw in John once I began to work with him, underneath all that talentâ€¦.something only I saw and no one else?"

"What?"

"Luckâ€¦."

"Luck? What do you mean by that?"

"John had a greatest amount of luck I had ever seen in a single person, he has fought in so many battles for the past years I have known him and he has escaped with his life many times overâ€¦.in situations where even the finest UNSC Marines or ODSTs would no doubt be killedâ€¦.he came back alive with resounding success and pulled victory from the jaws of absolute defeatâ€¦.without him and all he had doneâ€¦.the Covenant before it's schism, would have destroyed humanity, and without him, the Flood would have turned every living thing into nothing but food. That is what made him different from all the others of his unitâ€¦."

Paiway listened and said nothing until Cortana spoke once more.

"Hibiki is like that, once you get past the layer of what you think are due to being from Megeleâ€¦.you might find out things that you never expected."

"How can you be sure?"

"The best way to know is to try and not react rashlyâ€¦.analyze the situation before doing something and when you are sureâ€¦.then you can act. Trust me on this Paiway."

-----

End of Flashbackâ€¦

Paiway had no idea what was going on and thus she decided to observe and try to see just what was going on between Hibiki and Dita at the moment. She kept out of sight as best she could at the moment and observed and when she entered the kitchen, it was then that she saw Hibiki sit on the nearby table and there was Dita chopping something while Hibiki was moving about carrying some things.

She looked and then saw Dita crying and she wanted to find out what was happening and she knew that it was not Hibiki who was making Dita cry as the Tarak teen in question was a fair distance from Dita and she watched as Hibiki walked to her friend in a panic.

"You all right?!"

"Yes Mr. Alien, it's just these onions, they can really make anyone cry."

Paiway managed to stop her impulsive desire to think that Hibiki had made Dita cry as she heard the onions being mentioned at that moment. She continued to observe, her desire to understand what was going on between Hibiki and Dita was still strong and she could see that Hibiki was not doing anything to harm Dita and she began to think that maybe despite the fact that she still found men odd at times, they were not all that bad.

She decided to leave for now and figure out just what Dita was doing, maybe she could surprise her friend in turn and see how that would turn out.

In another section of the Nirvana, a certain Spartan was busy meditating in the training hall when he was greeted by none other than Cortana who was still wearing the coin necklace that he had given her during their time in Christmas. The Master Chief had always wondered just what was he going to do once they got to Tarak and Megele, those were big on his mind at the moment and also on Cortana's fate. He had always protected her and now there was a chance they would soon make it to the worlds that each faction of the crew came from, with the exception of their Talvernian allies.

He looked at Cortana and then back to the floor as Cortana joined him and they both meditated in silence for the time being, just absorbing the silence for the moment and as soon as Cortana was relaxed, the former Ai and now full woman turned and spoke to her long time friend maybe something more.

"John, are you all right?"

The Spartan barely nodded and took off his Mjolnir Mark IV helmet and then spoke to answer Cortana's question.

"Just thinking about what we're going to do once we make it back to the solar system that has both Tarak and Megele in it, I have no idea

what is going to happen once we get to the system, namely in the case of you and me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The way I see it, there are a few things that can happen, the first is that I wind up being treated like a lab specimen on Tarak if they get their hands on me. There's no way the women on Megele would welcome a man anywhere near them even if the man in question does not see women as the enemy. And there's you as well, I know there's no way the men would acknowledge you if you go with me Cortana if you decide to do so, they might shoot you instead, and I doubt the women of Megele would welcome you there as well, considering how you view men."

Cortana had to agree with the situation, the UNSC didn't exist at all here and there was nowhere for them to go, they can't stay in either world. So where did that leave them? The woman prided herself with her high intellect inherited from her 'mother' Dr. Catherine E. Halsey and she knew that in this world, they would be considered very weird to say the least. There was a good chance the men of Tarak would do their very best to turn the Master Chief against their enemies, the women of Megele. Or they could try and turn him into a lab test subject and try to discover what gives him his abilities, as well as try to use the Mjolnir Mark IV for their own uses. The same could be said for her as well. The men of Tarak would do who knows what if she was captured with John, and if she was on Megele, she would be ostracized for being with men.

The Talvernians who volunteered to aid them in the battle with the Harvesters would also have to deal with the soon to come problems as well. But for them, it would be different, they each had abilities and skills that were not the norm and they would be valued by the people who see them. However, she knew that with the already brewing conflict with the Harvesters, they were going to be needed once more and that was the one thing that they could be able to use to their advantage in this time.

"You might be right on those accounts John, but with the harvesters coming, things are going to be very hectic and we're needed here. I have no doubt the very second the people on both Tarak and Megele see just what the Harvesters plan to do on the worlds that humans live on regardless of gender, they will get the message."

The Spartan had to agree with that and then Cortana smiled.

"Besides that, I doubt the Captain or anyone of the crew of the Nirvana would willingly turn either of us over to either world considering all we've done for them. And no matter what happens I am not leaving your side, all right?"

"I guessâ€¦.but let's suppose this war ends with us being the victors, just for the sake of argument, what do we do now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I was trained ever since I was young to fight, I'm a Spartan Cortana, I was trained to the core to be a soldier, if the war does turn in our favor, what then? The UNSC does not exist out here and that means the Spartan II Program and the Covenant never existed."

Where does that leave me and you?"

Cortana thought it over once more and she spoke to the Spartan who she trusted more than anyone with the exception of her 'mother' and the other Spartans.

"There are two ways we can solve that. The first is that we remain with the crew of the Nirvana and help out if ever a new threat comes into play, but you will have to deal with the boredom of not doing anything for months or years as you'll only be called into handle the most extreme of situations."

"Fair enough. The other one being?"

"The other one being you find someone you can spend time with."

The Master Chief had removed his helmet during the part of the discussion and the very second he heard that, Cortana saw something that made even her smile. The Spartan had a mischievous twinkle in his eye and a very amused smile formed on his face. And sure enough, the Spartan actually laughed, not a boisterous or arrogant laugh, but a rich and well timed one that would have made him look like he had been told the best thing in the whole of the universe.

"Spend time with someone? You mean like I should get married like Maria-062 did?"

"That might be a bit much, but you'll never know right?"

The Spartan then gave a reply while having the same smile on his face.

"No offense meant Cortana, but I don't exactly fit the mold most women would think of as prime husband material."

Cortana smiled and replied.

"Remember when I said I chose you to be my partner? You were strong, swift, brave, tough, a natural leader, and a quick learner. You were like the rest of your fellow Spartans though you didn't excel in all the fields of war. But you had something none of them had, something only I ever saw, and that was luck. You can learn anything because you are a Spartan and I have no doubt being a civilian would be a bit easier in that regard. Plus, if you do have any children, let's say a daughter for example, NO young man would be willing to try anything frisky with your little girl, knowing who you are and what you could do to them. And if you ever have a boy, no other boy in their right minds would bully your kids, and the ladies would have to be at their best behavior if they want to court your kid."

"Apart from that, your kids would be more than able to take care of themselves in a fight if you teach them what you know. And your wife, I think would love you despite all the differences, after all, UNSC soldiers did have wives too, even ODSTs had families back home so why can't you? The way I see it, you'd make an excellent husband and father."

John had to admit that Cortana did have a few good points, but it still made him a bit amused and he made it clear to Cortana.

"You knowâ€¦call me crazy, but you seem very much in support of that idea, are you asking me out?"

Cortana laughed, but she was actually blushing at that comment. She had thought about it for some time but decided to wait for the time being and see how it would turn out. The woman stood up and kissed the Spartan right on the lips, making his eyes widen at that and she smiled once more and replied.

"I just might John. Got to go, I'm due to report to the bridge on recon dutyâ€¦.see you."

Cortana turned and smiled as she walked off in a way that she had seen some women doâ€¦.hoping to make the Spartan see her walk and the way she sashayed off to work in her outfit.

And it workedâ€¦

-----

In the world of the Harvestersâ€¦

"How soon can we get the information we need on the performance of our new weapons?"

The Council were ever eager for any and all new information that could help them with the soon to come war with the Nirvana and it's crew. The pirates, their allies, and most of all the Spartan had halted their operations for the very last time, they were going to stamp the Nirvana and it's crew out like the pests that they were and continue with the Harvest agenda to make sure that they would survive and endure. No one was going to stop them no matter the cost.

"They are undergoing the last of their trials and will be ready for a ground mission deployment as well as space borne combat operations."

The Council were more than eager to start their counter attack to the Nirvana and had dispatched a small fleet to handle the Nirvana once and for all, but they now had other things to worry about.

"How goes the operation to the system of Melanos for skin harvesting?"

"The people of Melanos had been fighting their best to stop us, and have assembled a fleet to stop our soon to come forces."

"Is their fleet a threat?"

"Negative, they do not have enough ships and even they did, I doubt their vessels and crews can beat a single battleship."

The rest of the Council agreed, their battleships were never defeated and could maintain independent operations away from any shipyard and was able to gather materials from floating bodies and could manufacture it's own parts and forces internally. There was no way the Melanos people could defeat their ship.

-----

On the bridge

Amarone was busy running through the scanners when she spotted a signal coming through the area ahead of them from the Clarion Spy Drones that were already ahead of the Nirvana on their routine recon run.

Buzam walked over and spoke to Amarone.

"What's the situation?"

"There appears to be a massive cloud of asteroids that are blocking out path Commander."

Magno had just arrived from her room and was now sitting on her command chair and then Cortana arrived and was now in the Holo-Tank. The elderly Captain looked over the information and then turned to the Commander and Cortana.

"All right, we can find another way through this, or we can blast our way through."

Buzam thought it over and then had a thought and ordered the bridge crew to scan the asteroids and the results showed that some of the asteroids actually had some large deposits of radioactive materials there. These were the ones that they would have to avoid blowing up lest the results would be very much something no one was in the mood to let happen.

"All right, have a demolition team clear out as many of the asteroids as possible so we can move through them using our shields as long as we avoid blowing up the ones with the radioactive materials in them, we'll be in the clear."

"Roger!!"

-----

Later

"Man, this is going to be hard work."

Parfait said as she was manipulating the control systems of one of the Vanguards to plant the special explosives for the job, her Vanguard was not armed with heavy weapons except for a small plasma torch. She was not alone however as a number of her engineering crew were also there to help out in their own Vanguards. Not all the Vanguards were used for combat. Seeing the need for space borne repairs and salvage runs, the pirates had rebuilt a handful of Vanguards and modified them for use by Parfait's engineering crew.

At the moment, the Talvernian soldiers were also trained in Vanguard operations and by Hibiki no less as he had the most operation time with a Vanguard out in deep space in the Nirvana's crew roster. They were also accompanied by a wing of Dreads with one lone Longsword there in the area that was piloted by none other than the Spartan himself. He oversaw the explosive placement as he had more knowledge in the use of explosives. Namely since they were using C-12 Shaped



Charges to do the work, namely much larger ones than the normal types.

"Can't be helped Parfait, that much C-12 has NEVER been used before in this magnitude, if it's done wrongâ€¦.well, let's just say it won't be pretty."

"Thanks for the heads up Chief."

The crew were busy as Bart was in the Navigation Well and was busy running through the areaâ€¦.however they were unaware that they had company heading their wayâ€¦.until it was too late.

Cortana was shocked as she picked up incoming contacts.

"Harvester Cube Fighters!!!!"

The pirates were caught completely by surprise by the sudden and unexpected assault as the ship was suddenly under attack by the enemy. Somehow the Harvesters had devised some sort of jamming system to evade the sensors of the Nirvana and it was only Cortana's sensors on the Forward Unto Dawn that detected them at the last moment. The Dreads quickly got into action as well as the Vanguard's and fought with the Cube Fighters and it was there that the Harvesters planned to cause as much damage as they could.

Parfait and her team had no choice but to abandon the area and move back to the Dreki to escape as their Vanguard's had no means of fighting back at all. The battle was quick to change as Cortana could not risk using the Archer Missile Pods and the 50mm Point Defense Guns as the battle field was too small for her to target accurately at the moment.

Outside, Hibiki was already in his Vanguard and fighting his hardest, he had recently been told by Dita that the whole affair was to surprise Paiway with a meal commemorating the anniversary of when she and the young nurse had joined the pirates. The Tarak teen had watched as Paiway came back and when the surprise was revealed was very happy with the news, but just as the party was about to start, the mission was called inâ€¦.and then this happened.

"Mr. Alien!!!"

Hibiki managed to fight off a pair of Cube Fighters and also defeat another one that tried to blindside him and then the Spartan was on his own as well, using the arsenals of his Longsword to fight back with. The Spartan was quick to support the others in fighting off the enemy forces but that was when he spotted the Cube Fighters aiming for the explosives that were still there, as well as seeing that the fighting had allowed some of the asteroids they had to avoid to move to the battle-zone and realizing the danger, quickly ordered the crew to evacuate. He quickly ordered Hibiki to get clear of the explosion.

As soon as they did so, the Cube Fighters blatantly fired at the C-12 Shaped Charges and the resulting explosion had been devastating, however the real blow came as some of the debris had struck the asteroids that had the radioactive materials in themâ€¦.the result was a massive explosion that blinded the sensors of just about everyone in the area, forcing the Nirvana to clear the area while

Hibiki and the Master Chief also had to leave the area quickly.

As soon as the explosion died off, there was a thick veil of radiation that was before the Nirvana and to the shock of the crewâ€¦there was no sign of the Master Chief's Longsword or Hibiki's Vanguard.

-----

On the Harvester home worldâ€¦

"Sirâ€¦we have lost contact with Scout team 097A."

"I seeâ€¦never mind the losses, have the rest of the forces we have rally with the assault force we are assembling to take Melanos, it's high time to get the skins we need."

"Yes sir."

-----

In the other sector of spaceâ€¦

Hibiki tried yet another frequency but it also proved futile as he had tried several others, the Tarak teen sighed in frustration and in a brief moment, lost his cool and banged the side of his Vanguard's cockpit with a fist.

"Damn it! The comm.'s completely down! I can't raise the Nirvana Chief!"

The Spartan knew that it was the same thing with him at this moment. The two had barely escaped with their lives after the battle had prematurely activated the number of modified Damage Packs that had to be used it in order to blast through the heavy asteroid field that they had encountered safely before the Harvesters had managed to get the drop on them through their new jamming technology. The Spartan was happy that his Longsword had been modified with a lot of extra technology, armor, ammunition and weaponry, had it not, then he would not have made it out alive from the battle.

Both he and Hibiki had burned out a lot of fuel and energy to escape the massive blast of the number of Damage and the large number of radioactive materials that they had been able to scan in the asteroids. They had gone out to oversee the placing of the explosives to move the asteroids aside safely but then the Harvesters attacked and they had to fight a defensive action to protect the engineers as they were evacuated in their Vanguards. He and Hibiki were cut off and had no choice but to fight their hardest and as soon as they were clear, the Spartan dumped out all the Damage Packs and detonated them to cover their escape.

However, they had traveled to a new sector of space away from the Nirvana and now they were on their own, the energy radiation from both the explosion and the distance they had at their current location had rendered them unable to contact the Nirvanaâ€¦not even the long range communication system of his MJOLNIR could reach the Nirvana, as he had tried to contact the ship and Cortana.

He was not the kind of guy to give up for any reason, but he could

tell that they would have to find another way to contact the Nirvana and they couldn't remain here either, there was no telling if there were other Harvesters in the area, and while they had their weapons full, they were not going to do well if the Harvesters would get the drop on them.

"All right, we're going to have to leave, we can't stay here, there's no telling if there are other Harvester forces in the area that might decide to ambush us."

"But what about the Nirvana if they come looking for us through the energy fields Chief? If we leave they might not find us."

"I have an idea, we can use some of the equipment here in the Longsword's inventory to act as piggy back messengers, I can use a much more powerful power cell and a special COM signal to guide them to our location."

"Are you sure it will work Chief?"

"We have no choice, like I said, we can't stay here and we need to find a good place to rest and prepare, cover my Longsword while I do some modifications and get to building the device we need."

"Roger that Chief!"

The Vanguard pilot and Tarak teen quickly took his Vanguard's sword out and got ready to defend his commanding officer as the Master Chief began to assemble the much needed gear in order to make a jury rigged transmitter. He checked the Longsword's inventory list to see just what he could work with in order to signal the Nirvana, he knew that with the radiation and energy emissions from the explosion, there would be no way a normal signal would be able to reach the Nirvana's scanners, so he would have to do some serious planning in order to make a make shift device to tell the Nirvana where they had gone.

The Longsword had a supply of NAV Marker beacons, the devices were about the size of a normal tick, a type of parasitic insect native to Earth and scattered in various planets still under the control of the UNSC and the ones that had evaded the attacks of the Covenant all those years ago. The devices had considerable power sources and had good signal strength and he had used this device more than once.

The mission to disable the URF station known as Jefferson Station had seen the use NAV Marker beacons and that had given them the chance to cause a good deal of inconvenience to Howard Graves, the URF leader at the time. However, the massive radiation in the area, would scramble it as his own COM system was being disrupted by the massive radiation at the moment. Along with that was the fact that there was a chance that the Nirvana would miss the signal and Cortana might miss it in the backlash of the radiation and energy emissions. Thus he decided to place a large number of NAV markers and then took out a pair of Chatters and Data Pads, he also jury rigged a pair of still functional hydrogen fuel cells to act as the main power source.

As soon as he was done, he made the message and then created the call signal that he knew Cortana already knew of and since in this universe no one knew that special portion of Spartan language, Cortana would be the only one who would know. He trusted the crew of

the Nirvana, but not that much to reveal Spartan language that had served to keep his team alive and safe in combat conditions.

As soon as he was done, the Spartan reached for a nearby ejection port and placed in the device and launched it, and had designed it to be activated by a signal from the Longsword's own COM system. He then contacted Hibiki.

"All right, let's move out."

The Tarak teen nodded and off the two of them went to try and get to a possible location that would prevent them from being detected and attacked by the Harvesters at this time. The Spartan knew it was a risk, but they had no other choice at the moment as he scanned the area before them to make sure that they were not suddenly ambushed like before.

He could only hope that the crew would make it through the area safely.

-----

Back in the Nirvanaâ€¦|

"It's no good, the radiation is still messing up the scanners."

Belvedere reported as she scanned once more and it was becoming very apparent to the rest of the Nirvana crew that there would not be able to scan for anything to tell them that Hibiki and the Master Chief were alive, however the crew were not going to give up hope just yet as they tried other wave lengths to try and get past the field.

"Captain, we might need to move through the field but as soon as we do, the scanners and comm. systems are going to be badly gummed up until we clear the energy field."

Magno nodded as Buzam's assessment, the elderly Captain was not happy with how things had turned out for them all at this time, this Harvester ambush had caught them with their pants down as the saying went, and now it had separated them from two of their key allies. She knew that the Master Chief was needed for countering the Harvesters' ground forces, and their boarding parties, plus his skills and leadership were very much essential and more so than that, he was a good friend. She trusted him a great deal when the situation was very bad and his efforts to fight the Harvesters made him important to them all.

Hibiki was also very much an important part of the crew, he had changed to a good young man while still having his fiery personality. He had been tempered by the Spartan to be an effective and skilled soldier and a Vanguard pilot since the Master Chief had taken him in and he was the most proficient with Vanguards and had routinely worked with the new Vanguard designs that were used in the previous battle with the Harvesters. The young man had also become less like the men back on his world in relation to his situation with women, he was less temperamental, more open minded, and also more understanding, thanks to being with the Spartan who taught him many things as well as hanging out with Cortana. And his contributions to

the crew were just as important as without him and his Vanguard, the VanDreads would not be present and the machines were needed to fight the Harvesters in space.

The Spartan was right in his saying that the VanDreads gave them a tactical edge in combat and Cortana also stated that the VanDreads would be the aces they needed in space battles as their respective abilities in ranged combat, close attack, speed, and defense made them key players in space.

And naturally, the two men were instrumental to the well being of the crew. Dita was beside herself with worry at how they would be able to find Hibiki, Magno could tell that Dita had fallen head over heels for the young Tarak teen though she had no doubts in her mind that the young Dread pilot had no idea about her newly developing feelings towards the boy. Meia likewise was not happy without him around and despite the fact that they would bicker, there was a sense of respect between the two, unlike before when they were very hostile to one another, and the friendship could blossom into something more. As for Jura, she said she wanted him back so she could combine with him, but there was the old saying that things can change and she did like the young man now that he had grown up so to speak.

And John-117, well, he was very much respected by his Fire Team members and NCOs, when they heard that he was lost in the fighting it made them very unhappy and they vowed to make the Harvesters pay for this action on their commander. Hilda, Kara, Rena, Carla, Sheena, and Fiona were the hardest hit as they had looked up to the Spartan with great respect and admiration—almost to the point that they considered him an adopted ohma or in the old Earth term, a father figure. That was understandable as the women were of various young ages. Kara was around nineteen, Hilda was twenty, Rena was around eighteen, Carla was twenty one, Sheens was nineteen, and Fiona was the eldest by the age of twenty two.

The NCOs of the Fire Team had once been the most resistant with the idea of working with the Master Chief, but after all they had gone through, they held him in the highest regard and they were not very happy with the idea of ANYONE either harming or insulting the Master Chief who they saw as a good example of a strong man worthy of respect. The girls had been outcasts from Megele and had been with the pirates a bit longer than the others, like Dita, and they were not very happy with their lives on Megele and the pirates spelled adventure. Joining the Master Chief's Fire Teams had at first sounded insulting, but the Master Chief's trust in their abilities, which prompted their promotion to NCOs and the battles they had been in under his command had made them admire him greatly.

Of course—the hardest hit was Cortana herself, ever since the battle and the subsequent disappearance of Hibiki and John, Cortana was working nonstop to try and locate them, and John most of all. The elderly woman could understand why Cortana would do all that to locate the Spartan. They had been through hell and back many times over and the fact that the Master Chief had risked all to bring her back from the clutches of the vile Flood Gravemind despite the dangers of going into the mutilated and transformed city of High Charity spoke volumes of how much Cortana meant to him, and it would make sense that Cortana would feel the very same way concerning Cortana.

The woman was currently in her AI form and even then, even with the fact that her face was glowing purple and was having symbols of data on it, the elderly woman could see the sadness, and worry etched all over the woman's face. It was no doubt a difficult thing for Cortana to have to leave John behind as he had ordered her to protect the crew while he took that suicidal risk to stop the Harvesters from overwhelming the Nirvana and worse. The elderly woman then spoke to Cortana.

"Cortanaâ€|."

The woman in her AI form turned and spoke.

"Yes Captain?"

Even her tone of voice has changed, don't worry dear, we won't give up.

"We will find them Cortana, I promise you, even if we have to comb this entire sector of space, we will find them."

Cortana nodded and a faint smile came to her face.

"Thank you."

-----

Elsewhere on the shipâ€|

Dita was pacing back and forth, her hands held together in worry and sadness as she tried her best to figure out just what to do, the knowledge that Mr. Alien and Mr. Green Alien were out there and possibly under attack by the bad aliens was making her very depressed. The redhead was there to help Hibiki if needed, but suddenly the Harvesters came out of nowhere and blindsided them while they were trying to clear away the asteroids that were in the area with explosives, just enough to send the asteroids away. She had tried to get to Hibiki's Vanguard with her Dread but the move proved to be worthless as the asteroids was in the area and the Cube Fighters were more than willing to do what they could in order to prevent them from uniting, they did the very same thing when Meia and Jura tried to help Hibiki. The redhead tried her best, but thenâ€|

"Mr. Alienâ€|.please be al right."

Dita was very worried and as she moved back and forth, the doors to the room opened and in walked Meia and Jura, along with Barnette. The redhead quickly walked or rather ran up to Meia and spoke rapidly.

"Any word leader?! Is Mr. Alien all right?!"

Meia could see the worry on Dita's face and so could Jura and Barnette at the moment. The blonde and emerald haired Dread pilots could see that Dita was very worried and they couldn't really blame the redhead. They however could only do what they could to keep Dita from doing something very dangerous that could very well get her in a heap of trouble.

Meia held Dita's shoulder as the young redhead sat down with a sad and forlorn look in her face.

"Dita, we will find Hibiki and the Master Chief all right, we have to find another way to get past the cloud of energy, so don't give up all right?"

Dita nodded while wiping a tear from her eye. Jura and Barnette noted that as well as Paiway who had just arrived on the scene, the young nurse was very unhappy that Dita was this sad, not because she disliked Hibiki, it was because that she had seen how much Hibiki meant to Dita and the Harvesters had taken him from her, though she doubted Hibiki was gone, the boy was too stubborn and with the Master Chief by his side, the young nurse had no doubt that Hibiki would be in good hands at least.

She then walked over to Dita and consoled her best friend along with Meia while Jura and Barnette.

It was then that things got to an even better start as Magno announced that they had received a message from Hibiki and the Master Chief.

-----

Earlierâ€|

The ship had managed to get past the radiation cloud and thankfully was now on the other side and as soon as their sensors were in the clear, they quickly began to scan the other sector of space, hoping to find any trace of their missing comrades. The Nirvana's radiation ships helped greatly in reducing radiation damage and therefore all the crew were all right at the moment the ship had cleared the area. But much to their dismay, there was no sign of either Hibiki's Vanguard or the Spartan's Longsword Fighter.

Howeverâ€|

Belvedere looked through the information to be sure and then spoke to the officers on the bridge.

"Captain! Commander! I'm picking up a coded signal from a nearby source."

"Can you bring it up?"

The blonde bridge operator nodded and as soon as the signal came on, they listened, and to their surprise it was a seven note song that seemed to repeat. This confused Buzam and Magno as well.

"What is that?"

"I'm not sureâ€|.it sounds familiar though."

Cortana however knew just what the seven tones meant. It was the highest secret the Spartans ever kept, the signal known to her as 'Oly Oly Oxen Free'. It was a near forgotten song used on Earth, at least their Earth. It was a very guarded secret among the Spartans, and only a few outside of their close knit group knew of it, one of them being herself, as well as Sergeant Avery Johnson, Dr. Catherine

Halsey, Deja the AI who had taught that to John and his comrades, and finally Senior Chief petty Officer Franklin Mendez. It had been used to act as an all clear and emergency signal. This also told him that Hibiki and the Spartan were all right.

"Captain, we need to get that item, it can help us locate Hibiki and John!"

The elderly Captain had a feeling about this but decided against it, some secrets were best left untouched as she had learned over the many years she had been around, and since this secret was between the Master Chief and Cortana, she couldn't interfere. She gave the order and soon enough Gascogne with a pair of Dreads and a Longsword escorting her ship, the Dreki was out in space.

They tracked the signal and found the make shift message pod device by the Master Chief. As soon as Gascogne was back on the ship, she gave her report.

"It looks like a Chatter and a Data Pad, as well as a makeshift hydrogen power cell and some tick like devices."

"Thos are NAV marker Beacons, UNSC issued equipment."

Cortana explained as Gascogne read the information in the Chatter and the Data-Pad and she smiled and gave her full report.

"The Chief and the kid are all right, they went in the direction ahead of us to avoid being caught by the Harvesters, they have left behind a NAV chart to show the path they are taking."

The crew were relieved and both Dita and Cortana were happy as well. Meia herself gave a slight smile while Jura was happy as well, while Barnette sighed a bit. Magno herself gave a wide smile and Buzam was also relieved and the crew quickly made their way to find their wayward comrades who knew what they were getting into this time?

-----

They had no idea

-----

In another part of space

"WHAT THE?!?!"

Hibiki shouted as he and the Master Chief quickly moved aside as a number of energy beams came right at them. The Spartan was quick to evade the shots despite a portion of his Longsword got hit hard on the wing, thankfully the armor held off the attacks well enough to not result in the fighter being completely destroyed. The Vanguard Hibiki piloted also got nicked and the two soldiers, mentor and student quickly got ready to fight.

That was when the shooters finally decided to make their appearance, and to the surprise of both Hibiki and the Master Chief, they were not Cube Fighters, the fighters smaller, more dynamic and were certainly not like the one that Harvesters used to ambush them months



before in an asteroid field. The ships that came out were certainly not of Harvester construction and there appeared to be at least some capital class ships there as well.

"Well now, this is unexpected."

Hibiki was still tense as he readied his Vanguard for combat, he then spoke to the Master Chief.

"Who do you think they are sir?"

"Not a clue, but they certainly aren't Harvesters since if they were they would have attacked us again after that salvo they shot at us."

"Human?"

"Probably, but until they do something that says so, we can't be all that sure."

Hibiki then got some sort of incoming message and as soon as he was done studying it, he informed the Master Chief that they were being hailed by the lead ship. As soon as he heard the voice, the Master Chief was sure that the crew were human and the one speaking was a man of authority.

"This the Anti-Earth Melanos Defense Fleet. From what planet do you hail from?"

Hibiki was furious and shouted right back.

"Listen here you!!! You've got some nerve asking us that question when you just tried to turn us into space debris! Ever heard of the old saying to identify first who the heck are you shooting at first?! As for where we come fromâ€¦"

"Hibiki, calm down, this is not going to work."

"Yes sir."

Hibiki said as the Spartan spokeâ€¦.he couldn't blame his protÃ©gÃ© and student for the harsh words he said as being shot at for no reason was usually the reason for the reaction he had made towards the old man, but the Spartan knew that they couldn't go spewing hostile words to every new person they met. And from the sound of things, he was very curious as to why the leader of the Fleet called themselves the Anti-Earth Fleet. That part of the situation didn't make any sense, however, he decided to place that line of thought elsewhere for the time being.

"Sir, you might want to explain why your forces shot at us first, we have not made any attempt to attack you or your forces, but you shot at us and we deserve an answer for that attack. And as to who were are, the young man is my student Hibiki Tokai from the planet of Tarak."

"Tarak?"

"And as for who I amâ€¦.I am Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 of the United Nations Space Command Navy, currently serving on the

Nirvana with Hibiki."

That got an immediate reaction from the crew of the Melanos forces as the Captain spoke.

"Master Chief John-117?! As inâ€¦.The Spartan-117 of the Nirvana Fire Teams?!"

Hibiki and the Spartan looked at one another with some surprise of their own. It seems they were easily recognized.

-----

Laterâ€¦

The Melanos people were looking at the Master Chief and Hibiki with some surprise and awe as they recognized just who they had taken in. They had heard rumors of the Spartan's victories against the Harvesters and how he could fight off hordes of Harvester Troopers. They had not believed it to be possible, but the very second they had seen the Spartan step out of his Longsword's boarding ramp carrying his trademark MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle in his hands and a pair of M7 Caseless SMGs on his hips, they knew that they were meeting the man who had led the crew of the Nirvana against overwhelming odds and pulling out victories that would have seemed impossible. The fact that such a legend was walking in the very ship as they were was very much something none of them had ever prepared for.

Hibiki smirked a bit as he heard the whispers being directed at his mentor and spoke to him.

"You've gotten really popular Chief."

"I suppose."

As they made their way to the bridge, the two got to meet the people of Melanos in a much more relaxed setting. The sight of a male and female working side by side made the Chief smile a bit more as he saw cooperation, trust and more with these people, the same kind of trust, cooperative spirit that he hoped would one day exist with the rest of the people he would meet, namely against the harvester threat that was looming on the horizon.

He was faced by none other than the man who was the leader of this fleet. He could see authority, duty, courage, and discipline. In some ways, the man reminded the Spartan of his old commanding officer, Captain Jacob Keyes as well as his instructor on Reach, Master Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez, from one soldier to another, he was starting to respect the man.

"I must apologize for our rash actions earlier, we have been on the defensive for so long that we have gotten a bit on edge with new arrivals coming into our sensor range. With the Harvesters and their tactics, we can't be too careful and cautious."

"It's understandable Sir."

Hibiki likewise calmed down and had to admit that he couldn't find fault in them either, had the situation been reversed, he would have

attacked first and then regretted it later on.

The Captain then looked at the behemoth in green and black armor with the golden visor, the man betrayed no fear, only respect and awe, as like all the crew, he had heard all about the Spartan's exploits battling the Harvesters as there had been the people of Talvern who had seen him in action and how powerful he was in combat. To know that here before him was a man who fought with the power of a full planetary army was a strange but not a fearful feeling.

"I've heard a great deal of your accomplishments with fighting the Harvesters Master Chief. And I must admit that you have inspired many of my crew here to resist, even more so for a very long time."

"I see, begging your pardon sir, but considering the way your fleet's been in formation you are acting as a blockade force against the Harvesters, are you expecting an attack?"

"Yes, we gathered as many ships as we could in order to meet the soon to come attack, we're all that's left to stand against the Harvester Fleet and our home system as well. We are familiar with the horrors that the Harvesters willingly inflict on humans and we will not let them take us without a fight."

Hibiki smiled and replied.

"At least you guys and ladies have a load more guts than the ones we ran into on Anpathos."

The leader gave a serious nod and replied.

"We're not like them, we don't see the Harvesters as Gods, more like inhuman butchers who treat humanity like we're nothing but livestock and spare parts to use for their own benefit. We're not going to let them do what they want with our people—we'd rather fight and die free than to be treated like animals!"

The same sentiment could be seen in the eyes and faces of the crew, The Spartan noted that and knew that they were not going to let anything happen to their people and while he respected that, he was a student of warfare and knew that while being on the defensive has advantages, it's disadvantages were very apparent.

"With all due respect Captain, your strategy might not work the way you think."

"What do you mean?"

"If you remain on the defensive, it might shield your home, but if you are defeated, then the Harvesters will have a clear shot towards your worlds. You would lose too many ships, soldiers, pilots, and more valuable personnel in a pitched battle. Not only that, you would exhaust your resources and personnel and in the end the harvesters can destroy you and harvest your words piecemeal."

The Captain was silent and pondered the words of the Spartan. Normally the crew would have said it was better to die fighting than to be enslaved and wiped out without a fight. However, the Captain had heard about this man's superhuman exploits in fighting the Harvesters and the forces and knew that he might have a point, they

could ill afford a defensive war and exhaust their forces and supplies as there would be no telling how long the fight would be.

"So what do you suggest Master Chief?"

"Lure them into ambushes and traps, turn your number weakness to an advantage, make them overextend themselves trying to catch you and then use hit and run attacks to weaken them. Make it seem like nothing will stop them from their goal and then surprise them when they least expect it, do not rely on conventional tactics when fighting them, surprise them at every turn and every engagement. Deprive them of all resources as they go deeper into your lands and then when they least expect it, surround them and attack."

The Captain pondered the information and so did the rest of the crew. It was then that the Captain spoke out.

"I have to thank you for not just the advice Master Chief, but for exposing the bastard who dared to turn against the human race."

The two men knew just who they were referring to and Hibiki replied.

"That Rabat bastard sold you two out as well?"

"Yesâ€¦we received reports from a passing number of human ships about your revelation of this Rabat, and we have found him to be the one responsible for the compromising of some of our outer colonies. When we find him, we will execute him on sight."

The Spartan spoke as well.

"I'll be the one to put the bullet in his head if you would like that captain, I made a promise to kill him myself after all."

"Nothing would be more fitting for that traitor, in the meantime, you and your student can remain here with us until the time is right for you to decide your options, though your support of our own battles with the Harvesters would be more than welcome."

-----

Laterâ€¦

The Master Chief was checking his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle while Hibiki was busy checking on his Vanguard with his tool kit on hand. Both of them however were also watching the numerous people moving about, working left and right and the Spartan saw men and women working side by side. And that for him was a sign of very good things and for a very good reason as well. The way they worked together showed cooperation, trust, discipline and more, much better than how things were in the beginning back on the Nirvanaâ€¦though the Nirvana's crew had improved over time.

The Tarak youth also noted that and while he was busy assessing the damage on his Vanguard, he couldn't help but notice how close the men and women were, there were smiles all around despite the dangers they were going to be facing at this time. The Tarak youth had to admit

that the sight of men and women working side by side and being friendly or even affectionate to each other was still something he couldn't quite grasp despite his exposure to the people from Talvern who were their allies in the war with the Harvesters and more besides. However he couldn't help but be amazed how the men and women of Melanos got together and wanted to know more about all this when he got the chance.

He then thought about the others, and also how they were doing, there was no doubt in his mind that Dita was frantic with worry on how they were going to find him, and Cortana was going to be doing everything she could to locate them as well. He then wondered about Meia and Jura as they were the ones he associated with the most apart from BC, Magno, Gascogne, and of course Ezra.

It was then that he began to think about the three Dread pilots, he then wondered why he was having odd thought whenever he was around themâ€¦

That train of thought was stopped when a pair of Melanos people came on the scene. One appeared to be a young woman who was a brunette and had one a suit that was designed differently than the others but was seen with men and women who did work on machines, and that told the two men that she was a technician or an engineer. She appeared to be in late teens or early adulthood and she held her hand out in greeting, offering a handshake to Hibiki.

"Hi there, my name's Seran, it's good to meet the two people who have been a thorn on the Harvesters' side for the past months."

The two greeted her, with Seran offering a salute to the Spartan which John-117 returned as well, and it was then that another man walked over and was dressed in a different suit than Seran and was the same worn by the people who appeared to be pilots. Much to the surprise of the two, the young man had an apologetic look to his face. And his words then explained just why he had that look on his face.

"I have to apologize for my actions towards the two of you, I was one of the first to open fire on your machines once you were in our scanner range were unknown contacts."

Hibiki looked at Seran's life partner with some surprise.

"YOU were the one who shot at me and the Chief?!"

The man gave a sheepish look and replied.

"Yeah, I have to apologize for that and the damage my shots did to both your machines, but we've been on the defensive so for so long it kind of made us very jumpy."

The Master Chief knew that while his student's reaction was to be expected, he knew how being on standby could wear down on people's patience and made them jumpy, that and other traumatic events had a very high factor making any person trigger happy at times, though in the young pilot's case, his actions were warranted as they couldn't afford to be too lenient, though he was not the least bit happy of being shot at by anyone.

"I can understand that, but next time, try to ID your targets before you shoot them, all right?"

The pilot nodded a bit and saluted the Spartan.

"I'll make sure it won't happen again Sir!"

"Good, now then, what's your name?"

"My name is Kouji Mikage, it's an honor to meet you Master Chief, and you as well Hibiki Tokai, I've heard of your battles with the Harvesters myself."

The four talked together and it was then that Seran handed the pair some bottles to drink from, the two were eager for a drink and the Spartan removed his Mjolnir Mark VI' helmet and drank as well as Hibiki did, however the drink was something that neither of them were familiar with the very second it hit their taste buds.

Hibiki spat out the drink while the Master Chief gave a slight growl at the drink while Seran and her life mate looked on with some amusement at the reactions of student and mentor, though they were respectful enough not to laugh at the faces of the two men.

As soon as the two recovered, the Spartan spoke first as he looked at the drink, which in his opinion was worse than drinking heavily aged UNSC Navy brand coffee, which he had done once and regretted. Navy coffee brands had not changed at all in the past hundreds of years and was always strong with a pinch of salt in it mixed with sugar. Despite being a Navy officer, the Spartan still had a preference to normal coffee, and this was certainly not a drink he was familiar with.

"Well that wasâ€¦different."

Hibiki's reaction was a lot more colorful and animated however.

"Yuck! What is this stuff?! This tastes just like the nutrient pills I ate back home, only worse!!!"

Seran was not the least bit discomfited as she drank the liquid, much to the amazement of both the Tarak teen and the Spartan. Sera's life partner replied.

"It's special vitamin drink, it's good for the skin."

John looked at the drink and then to the people who were around them and saw that while the people were pale in complexion like he was, their skin was a very healthy type and complexion like him though in a much better quality, while his paleness was due to wearing the Mjolnir Mark V and Mark V all the way to the Mark VI for some time..

"I seeâ€¦but I take it that's the very same reason the Harvesters are attacking your worlds?"

Seran and her partner nodded sadly and the Spartan shook his head while Hibiki growled.

"Those inhuman bastards, how I wish we could go to their own world and make them pay dearly for all they have put so many people through."

The Spartan however replied.

"Let's take the time to plan that part out Hibiki, as long as we have no idea where their main home world is, attacking them in their own backyard is a bad idea."

"But we can't stay here on our butts all the time and do nothing sir! We have to fight back somehow!"

Sera then replied.

"I think you all will get that chance. I have a feeling the Harvesters will make their move soon enough on all of us."

As soon as the alarms were heard, the Spartan turned and replied.

"They're here."

-----

In the Nirvana's command bridge

"Captain! I've picked up a massive energy blast at least a hundred kilometers from our area ahead of us!"

Cortana and the others looked at one another and Magno gave the order to full power to all engines, they wasted little time as they had followed the course outlined by the second makeshift message pod that was still made with some NAV Marker Beacons as well as a Chatter and Data Pad left behind. Whatever was going on over there, they were not going to be left out.

And they hoped that they would find Hibiki and the Master Chief there as well, hoping that they were going to be all right.

Naturally in the lead was none other than the three Dread pilots with Meia doing her best to keep Dita from running off in search of Hibiki and winding up in what Goddess knows kinds of trouble, thought she too hoped to find Hibiki and the Spartan alive, the same went for Jura who was being followed by Barnette. The Dreads were naturally followed by a number of Vanguard pilots by the Talvernian soldiers and then they were followed by Longswords as well as the Nirvana.

It was when the scanners picked up the transponder signal of a certain person that got the rest of the Nirvana crew on fire and they gunned their engines to reach the area in time.

-----

In space

"Wow. what a mess."

Rabat said as his ship flew through the floating and powerless hulks of Harvester Cube Fighters, Seed Ships, and Space urchins, it looked

like a whole sale slaughter had happened here. There were ruins of Melanos fighters as well as some of their larger capital ships and cruisers, but as soon as he passed the floating debris of the two forcesâ€¦.he saw a sight he could have thought to be impossible.

A massive hulk of a ship was still floating there in deep spaceâ€¦.it was torn apart as sections of it were burning from still leaking and burning fuel, the ship was blown completely apart by what appeared to be a massive explosion that tore it from the inside. Rabat knew what that ship wasâ€¦.a Harvester battleship. But the former super ship of the Harvesters had been reduced to a burning, hulking ruin. The main bulk of the ship resembled a melon splattered by a massive hammer as it was still burning like mad all over the place.

"How theâ€¦.impossibleâ€¦.there's no way!!!!"

The Harvester spy had seen the impossibleâ€¦.an entire Harvester battleship utterly obliterated into total uselessness! There was no way the Melanos fleet could have done this on their own, there was just no possible way they could have done this with the level of fire-power they had on hand. This was no doubt going to cause a hell of an uproar in the Harvester home world if they heard that the battleship had been utterly reduced into nothing but a ruined wreckâ€¦.and judging by the amounts of radiation, they had used nuclear weapons.

But there was no way a nuclear weapon could have THIS kind of destructive potential and his forays into the Melanos systems told him that they did not have a working nuclear arsenal with their forces. But there was no denying the fact the only way this level of destruction was possible was through the use of nuclear weaponry.

It was then that he spotted a certain Vanguard and Longsword. He scanned the two fighters and smiled evilly as he was told by the scanners that there were two occupants in the two machines and he was getting ready to have his payback. The Harvester spy had every intention to make the two pay with their lives for making his life a living hell. The mercenary powered up his mechan and was about to attack.

However, the mercenary was forced away as several bolts of energy fire came right at him, and there were three voices there on the scene.

"LEAVE Mr. ALIEN AND MR. GREEN ALIEN ALONE!!!!"

"Back off Rabat, you are going nowhere near that long Longsword or that Vanguard!"

"Same here, if you even think of harming the kid I can combine with, you're dead!"

Rabat swore as he found himself surrounded by not only the three Dreads, but a wing of the well modified Vanguards, and some Longswords and sure enough he heard Cortana speak. And the former UNSC AI and now human woman was speaking in a very hostile tone.

"Back off traitor, you so much as even fire a pebble out of anywhere in that ship of yours, I will shove an Archer Missile right up your



ass and blow you up like a piñata in a festival!!!"

"Same goes for me you sorry sack of shit!!! You lay a hand on either the boy or the Chief, my crew and I will tear you apart!!!!"

The Talvernian soldiers piloting the Vanguard's were already priming their weaponry. They had been told just who Rabat was and the knowledge that the man had willingly betrayed all of humanity to the Harvesters for profit and to save his own skin had driven them to being in a deep rage. It was the fact that Hibiki and the Master Chief were in the need to recover at the moment that they didn't quickly attack Rabat.

Rabat gritted his teeth, he had the punk and the freak in his sights, but he could do little to make them pay. The mercenary however had no idea that the Spartan was very much conscious and had secretly armed the Longsword's weaponry despite the heavy damage the fighter had suffered.

Johyn-117 knew that Rabat would do anything to have his revenge the very second he had spotted the mercenary trader and traitor's ship. He knew that he would have one shot and had armed one of the missile pods and had slowly aimed it at Rabat's ship right at the cockpit. The arrival of the Nirvana's crew, the Dread squadron, and the Vanguard pilots changed that. The Spartan gave a slight smile and as soon as he got a signal from the Nirvana, he saw Cortana's face and even if he saw that she was in her AI form, he could see the joy in her face.

"John! Are you all right?!"

The Spartan made the same 'Spartan Smile' and gave her a slightly teasing reply.

"What took you so long?"

-----

In the Command Bridge!

Cortana smiled and she nearly cried at the response, she tried to hide her emotional outburst from the others, but Buzam and Magno were not fooled and neither was Ezra, they all knew how close the woman was to John and seeing him alive and still there was something she would have loved more than anything.

The elderly captain placed those thoughts aside and spoke directly to Rabat in a very serious tone.

"Rabat, the last time we met the Master Chief told you to leave before he killed you for betraying the whole human race and the next time you would meet he will kill you. Now it's my turn, you have no business being here Rabat, no doubt the only reason you came here was to act like the parasite that you are by stealing from the people who died here. Unless you want to be reduced into nothing but atoms right here and right now, you will turn around and leave."

-----

In the Vanguard!

Hibiki shook his head and opened his eyes and as soon as he saw that he was getting an incoming message on his comm. system and as soon as he activated it, he saw none other than a certain trio of female pilots who's Dreads he could merge with. He couldn't help but feel very much relieved at that fact that some familiar faces were now on the scene. He cringed a bit as the feel of the shrapnel on his body, thankfully the very worst of the damage was blocked by his Marine Body Armor and for that he was very thankful for it. That coupled with his Tarak upbringing and the training he had gotten from the Master Chief had toughened him up a lot.

"Mr. Alien!!! Are you all right?!"

"I'mâ€|.coughâ€|.still here right?"

Jura then spoke.

"Hibiki you're a mess, you need to head to the Medical Bay fast."

"Heh, thanks for the concern, how did?"

Meia answered for the others.

"We followed the signal and then detected a massive charge of energy and here we are. We're lucky we made it in time, how badly are you hurt?"

"A broken rib on the right side of my body I think, thank Grand Pa and the First generation the thing wasn't a serious one or punctured any vital organ, hurts like hell though. Got some bruises and a few gashes, thankfully the Armor held it off, and I think I've got a crack in my left shin bone."

Meia looked very concerned at Hibiki and so did Jura and Dita, which seemed to make him feel very happy for one reason or another. Dita was close to tears and she spoke.

"Don't worry Mr. Alien, when you get back here, I'll have Mr. Doctor make you all better!"

-----

In Rabat's shipâ€|

Rabat pounded his ship's console hard while Utan looked on, he had the chance to finally pay back the snot nosed brat and that freakish superhuman, he had them right there where he wanted them so he can finally pay them back for the trouble and torment they had placed on him!!!

But now their allies were there and he couldn't do anything, his defense mecha had nowhere near the firepower needed to fight off the force before him. He growled and then sighed as he consoled himself as he turned his ship around, but as he was about to leave, he taunted the pirates and their Talvernian allies.

"Fine ladies, I'm leaving but don't think you are going to have it easyâ€|.soon another Harvester fleet is on it's way here, and they

will deal with you since I already told them your location."

-----

Cries of outrage and anger were heard as the Nirvana's crew and their Talvernian allies as Rabat left the area as fast as he could. Magno restrained the crew and ordered them to worry about Rabat later, they would deal with the traitorous bastard soon enough, for now they had things to take care of and allies to help. The Vanguard's escorted the damaged Longsword of the Master Chief and also the Vanguard of Hibiki, they had a lot of things to plan out if what Rabat said was true. The sight of the Harvester Cube Fighters and Seed Ships that littered the battle area was a big indicator of how serious the battle was.

And the biggest indicator was the massive hulk of what appeared to be a massive sea cucumber like vessel that was torn apart like a hotdog stuffed with a VERY large amount of explosives. The Elderly Captain and her Commander knew that sooner or later, as soon as the Master Chief and Hibiki were back and fully recovered from their injuries, they were going to find out just what sort of opposition were they going to have to fight in the coming hours.

This was going to be one heck of a battle field soon enough.

-----

To be continuedâ€¦|

-----

Author's notes:

Damnâ€¦|.I have updated this baby in a while now huh? I got so wrapped up with Naruto Dragon Champion and many others that I forgot the whole thing. But not this time, I am going to be busy with this since it and several other projects of mine are nearing their finish line at this moment. So I hope to get all this finished before the end of the semester and the onset of the summer vacationâ€¦|.which I am also looking forward to as I need to make some plans of my own.

Anywayâ€¦|.what happened to the Harvester Battleship that was sent to attack Melanos? How the heck did it turn from once a pristine and undeniably deadly Harvester Battleship into a floating hulk of metal that looked like a can filled with C-4? Did the Master Chief and Hibiki have anything to do with?

Here's a trailer:

\*\*\*\*\*

"What are you going to do Chief?"

"Hibiki, remember that time when we rescued Miss Gascogne from that wreck?"

Hibiki and the other Melanos soldiers, and engineers, including Seran

were gasping as the Master Chief revealed just what was in the crates he had on the Longsword. Hibiki however was quick on the uptake and recognized the weapons. He grinned and then spoke to his mentor.

"With all due respect Chief, you're crazy."

"I know. But we don't have any choice at this point."

Seran spoke as she gulped at seeing a certain hazard symbol on the weapons.

"What are we going to do with all these weapons?"

The Spartan replied as he went to getting the weapons out and ready for use.

"Simple Engineer Seranâ€¦we are about to turn that Harvester battleship into the universe's largest Fragmentation Grenade ever recorded."

\*\*\*\*\*

See you on the next chapter!

## 17. Chapter 17

VanDread â€" Halo

Disclaimer: I do not own anything related to either VanDread or Halo, they belong to their respective companies and those being Gonzo and Bungie.

### Chapter 16

#### Battle Plans

( ): Thoughts

-----

In the Medical Bay of the Nirvanaâ€¦

Duero was running the diagnostics on both Hibiki and the Master Chief, John was still in his Mjolnir Mark VI and Duero was using a diagnostics pad made by the UNSC to check the Spartan's condition through the medical sensors of his battle suit. Hibiki had bad injuries but thankfully the injuries were not crippling, and he would be fine with the right medication.

When the two had been brought back with Hibiki in a gurney, Dita clamped onto him and was very sad to see her Mr. Alien in such a state while Jura and Meia were alongside them as well, the young Tarak Teen did his best to assure Dita he would be fine but she was still worried and had to be pried away by both Jura and Meia so Duero could do his work on him. That was at least several hours ago and both of them were recovering well enough to be able to move about.

As Duero was done running diagnostics on the Spartan, the Master Chief then asked the question to the young Talark medic.

"So, what's the word?"

"You've fully recovered from most of your injuries Master Chief, the Mjolnir Mark VI's medical care systems kicked in while you were still injured and brought you back to full recovery."

"What about Hibiki?"

"His injuries are a bit more serious but he's also on the road to recovery and is out of danger, I've used some special healing solutions on his broken bones and they have already mended, he'll be able to fight and fly though now is not the right time for such things as his body is still somewhat tender."

"I see."

The Spartan got to his feet and moved his body as Duero logged in the information concerning his two patients and it was then that the door to the Medical bay opened and in walked or rather, ran, Dita, followed by Meia, Jura, Cortana, and Buzam as well.

"Mr. Alien!!!!"

Hibiki had no time to recover when Dita hugged him and didn't release him, however, when he would have normally tried to pry her off of him, he didn't partly because he didn't plan to aggravate his injuries even more than he had to, and the other part was due to the fact that it was nice to see her again.

Jura and Meia watched as Cortana walked over to the Master Chief and smiled and spoke to him in a very happy voice, showing her joy at seeing him alive once more.

"Good to see you again."

Buzam knew that now was not the right time, but being the serious leader that she was, she knew that they had a lot of work to get to and she turned to Meia first and spoke.

"Meia, as soon as you and your fellow Dread pilots are ready, I want you all to do a full recon scan of the area and gather as much intelligence information as you can, namely on thatâ€¦thing out there."

"Yes Commander!"

Buzam then turned to Dita and spoke.

"Dita, I want you to go with them as well on the mission, I need to have Hibiki and the Master Chief fill me and the Captain in on what exactly happened out there."

"But Commanderâ€¦.Mr. Alien's still hurt!"

Hibiki however replied.

"I'll be fine Dita, I just need to get some movement and then I'll

come back here for any other medical treatment okay?"

Dita could see that there was no way she could convince Hibiki to rest a bit more, and she knew that Buzam was right, still, it made her worry for Hibiki's health and safety and she spoke once more to him to make sure that he understood her.

"All right, but if anything goes wrong you come back here and let Mr. Doctor treat you okay?"

As Hibiki nodded, Dita went to join Meia and the others and Cortana who had seen the whole thing replied with a gentle smile in Dita's direction.

"She got it bad."

John had to agree and after Hibiki got back into his clothes and Marine Body Armor which was still serviceable and not in the need of being replaced, both he and Hibiki made their way to the Conference Room.

-----

Meia ran through her Dread's systems and then spoke to all the Dread pilots as they were getting ready to fly out to do their recon sweep of the battle field, it was going to be quite the mess they were going to be flying through, but they had little choice, they needed as much information as possible in order to prepare for a possible attack by the Harvesters.

"All right ladies, we're doing an initial recon scan to find out just what happened here and get ready for a possible attack, Team A and Team B will do the first initial recon scan while Team C and Team D will handle perimeter defense. Once we're done, Team C and Team D will take their turn in the recon scan while Team A and Team B will handle the defense. I'll be in command of Team A and Team B, Jura, you and Barnette will handle Team C and Team D, is that clear?"

"Yes Meia!"

"All right, let's get to it!"

The Dreads were quick to take off while Cortana deployed an extra team of Longswords to help out defense and also external recon of the area before them. The former UNSC AI was happy that the Master Chief was okay, now all she had to worry about was the soon to come fight, and that was why she was running through her inventories to see just what sort of surprises she could unleash on the Harvesters.

-----

In the Conference Room

Magno looked at both men and gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank the Goddess we got there in time to help out, you two okay?"

The Spartan replied first.

"I'm in good straits Captain."

Hibiki also nodded and he touched his injured rib and his leg while wearing his Marine Body Armor that was still in good operational condition, the young man gave a confident smile and replied.

"As long as I can move and fight, I'm good to go Grand Ma."

Magno smiled at that remark and was happy that both men were on good condition, but she needed to know just what had happened since they had been separated with the rest of the crew, they recalled seeing the debris and more. She had Meia and the other available Dread pilots do a recon sweep of the area to determine what had happened and they brought in a lot of information.

Buzam nodded as well, while she too felt relief that they were all right, she was able to hide her feelings on the matter a lot more than the others. She got to the business at hand and spoke to the two, whatever happened there was important to them so they had an idea of what had happened when they had been separated from the two men.

"I know that now is not really the best time to be asking you two to be doing duties but we have sent Meia and a recon team to sweep the battle field, and judging from the data they had been sending us from the scanners, there must have been a serious battle here. But since you were here before us, what can you tell us?"

The two looked at one another and the Master Chief nodded to Hibiki who got the message and gave his report, he had been trained not to use too many flowery words, but important ones and very much needed tactical and strategic data, no doubt from his training under the Spartan and he personally knew that the information could help them in the near future.

"The ships which are not following Harvester design belonged to the people of Melanos, they too were being targeted by the Harvesters for their skin."

Both Buzam and Magno gave looks of utter disgust at the information and the thought that even the Harvesters were after the skin of humans made them all the more determined not to let them have their way with the human race. Despite their disgust, Buzam nodded for Hibiki to continue with his report.

"We were able to meet up with their commander after we accidentally got shot at."

"You were shot at?!"

"Yes, at the time they were rather jumpy being on the defensive all the time and we tripped their sensors at the wrong time. After we got the confusion fixed, we learned that they were betrayed by a certain traitor to the human race."

Buzam frowned and Magno gave a slight snarl, they already knew just who Hibiki was talking about and that was when the Master Chief decided to get into the report and Hibiki moved to allow his mentor and guardian to speak.

"The ruined ship that you see there was a Harvester Battleship, no doubt one of their autonomous command ships and from what me and Hibiki saw it has a lot of fire power, at least four sections of this frame carry at least four Seed Ships per area of the section and there are at least a two hundred or more Seed Ships there on standby. The ship also boasts one single powerful main cannon as well as several smaller banks of energy based weapons, and also some torpedo tubes as well."

The two women were shocked by that and wondered just how can the Nirvana defeat such a ship, a lot of the Melanos ship wreckage told them that the battle waged by the Melanos people with the Harvesters must have been very bloody and destructive. However they knew that the two men were not the kind to let others do the fighting, Hibiki's nature told them otherwise, while the Spartan was trained to fight battles and considering his successes, could pull victory out of overwhelming odds.

"So how exactly was a ship with that much power and weaponry defeated, or rather torn apart like a can filled with fire crackers? I take it you two had something to do with that?"

Hibiki gave a slight smile and John-117 merely replied.

"You could say that Ma'am."

Magno gave a slight smile.

"All right youngsters, I'll bite, how did you two characters deal with this mess?"

-----

Flashbackâ€¦|

Hibiki and the Master Chief looked at the massive vessel and the Spartan could see that this ship was not going to be a pushover. It resembled a Covenant Carrier only in the sense that it was made by inhuman hands, but in the design it was different, it resembled a sea cucumber of sorts and he had seen that kind of aquatic animal before in his studies on Reach and from some of the private lessons Dr. Catherine had given them when they were not in training, just for the fun of it.

This was no sea creature however in the eyes of the Spartan and it was a deadly threat to all life and from what he could see of the support fleet it would prove to be a deadly mess for them to clean up. However the Master Chief didn't feel any fear at the sight of that thing, compared to the ships he had boarded before and had seen in action, this new ship was not that big a threat in his mind.

Hibiki could tell that the Spartan was not impressed by the sight of the Harvester battleship even though he was, there was no way that he could fight that thing head on but maybe the Chief had a plan, the Master Chief had always planned out some very hair raising missions and if there was one thing the Tarak teen could count on to be a constant, the master Chief's plans worked many times before. The young teen could see the fear in the eyes of the others however and the fight was well under way.



The Melanos fighters moved out and then the Spartan saw the Cube Fighters make off to fight the human pilots and the Spartan knew that Mikage was there and this fight was going to be the kind of fight that was going to really push the envelope. He then turned to the Captain and spoke.

"That's what you were trying to fight against Captain?"

"Yes Master Chief, that is but one of the Harvester force's Main Battle Ships, it houses a great deal of weaponry and has a massive fleet, we would pull back had this been different, but we can't, if we do, then our world is doomed and we will not be able to stop the Harvesters at all."

Hibiki and the others looked on as the massive space battle began and it seemed that the Harvesters will have the upper hand in this battle not only in terms of numbers, but overwhelming fire power. The Melanos pilots did their best to pull a fighting chance and their much larger ships managed to down a number of Seed Ships and Urchin Ships as well as a large number of Cube Fighters, but while the Melanos ships had deadly firepower against the smaller Harvester forces, the fact remained that the Harvesters had numbers on their sides and with the harvester Battleship providing heavy power to the attacks and the numbers of the Harvester forces, the situation looked fairly grim. for the Melanos forces.

The captain and the crew of the ship that Hibiki and John were on did his best to coordinate the forces under his command and while they had a good effort, the Harvesters were still proving to be a problem indeed as they managed to begin ripping their way through the fighter screens of the Melanos forces and the Spartan knew that as soon as the harvester broke through, they would clear the way for the boarding craft to make their move, the fighters of the Melanos forces who were disabled were forced to kill themselves in any way possible as the harvester forces attempted to take them alive for Harvesting.

The boarding craft came into play and the Harvester Shock troopers began to get to their work of invading the ships and attacking the crews of the ships that they were onboard, the crews panicked as they tried to fight back and it was not long before some ships were forced to activate their self destruct modes to prevent being overwhelmed.

Hibiki clenched his hands in anger as he watched the carnage before him and he gripped his hands even tighter into fists and he wanted to do something to stop this slaughter but he knew that there was no way his Vanguard could fight that many all at once and the Master Chief's lessons in tactics taught him that meeting force with force was not the best way to defeat their foes. He knew that there was going to be a chance soon enough.

The Spartan had enough and quickly decided to deal with the Harvesters, he knew that the Melanos forces, despite their courage and their team work, they were going to need some way to deal with the Harvesters and he already had a very good idea on just how to deal with the Harvesters in a way that what was considered the ultimate form of insanity. But he had done it before and he could very well do it again.

"Hibiki, let's go, I have a plan."

Hibiki nodded and the two turned to the Captain and he spoke to the two of them.

"What are you planning?"

"We're going to give the Harvesters a good surprise. Have your best engineers meet us at the Hanger Bay under full escort Captain."

The Captain had no idea what the Spartan had in mind, but having heard stories about the man in action, he decided to give the order and sent his best engineers to head for the Hanger Bay under full escort. The Harvesters deployed several boarding craft toward the ship and the Melanos pilots managed to destroy at least half a dozen of the boarding craft while the main guns of the ship eliminated ten more and it was not long before there were reports of Harvester Shock Troopers in the ship.

-----

The Harvester Shock Troopers fought with the Melanos security teams and while the people fought their best to hold off the incoming forces of the Harvesters, they were not able to do well as there were too many of them coming and attacking them for a concerted effort to be made to force the Harvester Shock Troopers to pull back and be forced to run and be destroyed. Several more Melanos people were taken out and some were tackled and being cut up by the Harvester Shock troopers, much to the fear of many other Melanos soldiers.

However, they were about to get some backupâ€¦one Harvester trooper turned to kill one survivor but was quickly torn to shreds by several well placed shots from a high powered rifle and the Harvester trooper bled all over the place and then fell down, the others turned and then to their surpriseâ€¦there before them was the Spartan that they had been programmed to terminate.

The surviving Harvester Shock Troopers began to move to eliminate the Spartan, but the Master Chief was not deterred and charged at them and managed to scope up a discarded Melanos Blaster rifle and with amazing skill, strength, and control, the Spartan fired both weapons, the lasers being fired by the Melanos rifle mixed with 7.62x51mm rounds from the Spartan's MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and cut down several more of the Harvester Shock Troopers and one tried to attack the Spartan, but the Spartan slammed the laser Rifle into the face of the Harvester Shock Trooper and then when it broke offâ€¦slammed the sharpened part through the Shock Trooper's neck.

Hibiki was there as well and through his training, conditioning and experience, the Tarak teen was able to get his first kill of a Harvester Shock Trooper as one was about to attack his mentor and he took aim and firedâ€¦normally someone like him in terms of body build and height would have had some difficulties, but since training with the Spartan for a long time since the Master Chief took over watching and training him, he had grown used to firing the weapon and had taken a kneeling stance to better his accuracy as he was nowhere near able to take the full load of the recoil like John-117 could.

His action proved helpful as his shots hit true and the Harvester Shock Trooper turned with several smoking holes in the chest and sides and as it turned to fire, the young man relaxed himself and pressed the trigger of his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle, sending three more rounds right into the head and neck of his targetâ€¦dropping the Harvester Shock Trooper quickly. The Spartan turned and gave Hibiki a nod of approval and the two moved on with Hibiki running to keep up with the Master Chief, the survivor was quickly able to recover and pick up his weapon, what he saw was amazing, that Spartan had taken down half a dozen of the aliens in a few minutes.

The Spartan then turned to the survivor and gave the man a spare laser rifle and spoke.

"Get up and fight, don't let them win."

Hibiki and the Master Chief knew that they needed all the help they could get and decided to back track to get him and the man could see that since they came back for him, they were going to be his back up, and he felt courage hit him for the very first time since the fight, and from what he had seen, it showed to him that the Harvesters can be beaten after all. If the Spartan could do it and so could his Tarak teen comrade, why can't he?

"I won't sir!"

The man took the rifle and got up to join the Master Chief and the Spartan, Hibiki and the newly encouraged Melanos soldier moved out and quickly moved out to head to the Hanger Bay and then they encountered several more of Melanos soldiers being pinned down by a number of Harvester Shock Troopers and some were badly wounded by plasma fire, the Spartan quickly moved in forward and charged, firing several accurate bursts at the Harvester Shock Troopers and killing a number of them since they were so focused on the Melanos soldiers that they were unaware of the arrival of the Spartan.

The Harvester Shock Troopers turned and the Master Chief ran forward at high speed, something that was seen by the two men and the other Melanos soldiers as the Spartan moved quickly to gun down all the Harvester Shock Troopers, one tried to engage the Spartan in hand to hand combat by using it's blade, but the Spartan retaliated by knocking it into the wall with a single punch and then he fired several rounds into the creature and sent it to the ground dead. The Harvester Shock Troopers tried to fire at the Spartan, but he moved too fast for them to recover before he kicked on hard in the chest and sent that unit flying backwards and then he smashed the butt of his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle into the head of another, splattering it's CPU 'brain' all over the place and the other Harvester Shock Troopers were taken down by the concerted fire of the newly rescued Melanos soldiers as well as Hibiki.

The Melanos were impressed by the combat skills of the Spartan and it was not long before they rallied under him and they led a counter attack with their destination being the Hanger Bay to help the Spartan with his plans to deal with the Harvesters. They all encountered great resistance from the Harvesters who were doing their best to destroy the Spartan as their forces moved to eliminate the Master Chief, knowing that he was a threat to them and their masters.

This allowed the Melanos forces to escort their engineers to the hanger Bay easily as the Spartan's presence lured away the Harvester Shock Troopers infesting the ship's area and that allowed them to move to the location under the Captain's orders. The Spartan was no mere lure however and proved to be more than able to kill the Harvester Shock Troopers as he and his currently assembled forces were moving through the ship and rescuing more survivors.

The way the Master Chief efficiently dispatched his foes was awe inspiring to the Melanos forces and they were reinvigorated and since the captain and the bridge crew were watching the whole thing and showing it to their comrades in the ships, it inspired them as well to fight ever harder and it was not long before the concerted efforts of the Melanos soldiers allowed them to face off the Harvesters and get their medics to heal their wounded.

Those Melanos soldiers who were with the Spartan and Hibiki pushed on and those who couldn't due to injuries were quickly rescued by their medics, this gave the Melanos people a fighting chance to secure their ships and hold the line

-----

In the Hanger Bay

As soon as the strike team comprising of the rescued Melanos soldiers and both Hibiki and the Master Chief arrived, the rest of the forces arrived with full escort, with a good number of the Harvester Shock troopers focused on killing the Spartan, the Melanos forces were able to rally together and launch a counter attack and escorted the engineers, one of whom was engineer Sera herself and as soon as they made it to the Longsword and then hauled out a number of crates from the storage area of the Longsword he piloted.

As soon as the crates were on the ground, he gave an order for the security forces to form a defensive pattern around them and then spoke to Sera and the engineers as the security forces did just what he asked of them though they wondered just what he had in mind to save their bacon in this dark hour..

"Do you have any message pods or hollow missiles on this ship?"

Sera thought about that and nodded.

"We have a set of more powerful anti-ship torpedoes in storage here but they were never used since they had not been loaded with any form of explosive warheads. Why do you ask that?"

"I have an idea on how to kill that monstrosity out there."

What are you going to do Chief?"

The Spartan pressed the punch code

"Hibiki, remember that time when we rescued Miss Gascogne from that wreck?"

Hibiki and the other Melanos soldiers, and engineers, including Sera were gasping as the Master Chief revealed just what was in the crates

he had on the Longsword, as inside were at least twenty Fury TacNukes in the each of the crates. The Melanos people might not have recognized them Hibiki however was quick on the uptake and recognized the weapons. He grinned and then spoke to his mentor.

"With all due respect Chief, you're crazy."

"I know. But we don't have any choice at this point."

Seran spoke as she gulped at seeing a certain hazard symbol on the weapons.

"What are we going to do with all these weapons?"

The Spartan replied as he went to getting the weapons out and ready for use.

"Simple Engineer Sera—we are about to turn that Harvester battleship into the universe's largest Fragmentation Grenade ever recorded."

"How?"

"These are Fury Tactical Nuclear Weapons or in simple terms, nuclear grenades. I need you to reconfigure these torpedoes to store these twenty TacNukes into themselves and have them contain a release system to release the TacNukes in a spreading pattern and also have them detonate at a span of at least thirty seconds through a delay system. Can you do that?"

Sera and the other engineers looked at one another and nodded to the Spartan, it was risky and was unheard of, but if that would give them the fighting chance they needed to win this coming fight they were more than ready to put their abilities to the test.

As the engineers worked on the design, the Spartan quickly set the Fury TacNukes and activated their set time delay systems for them to detonate at thirty seconds. As soon as the delivery system was set and ready the Spartan had the torpedoes loaded onto the hard points of his Longsword and he contacted the bridge and in detailed explained his plans to the Captain. As soon as he was finished, the Captain was very much in shock at what the Spartan had in mind.

"You want to do that?! It's crazy!"

"But we don't have much in terms of options Captain, I need a flying wedge of ships that you can spare and some good pilots to clear the way for us to fire the missiles into the main ship after the ships fire a concentrated barrage onto the Harvester Battleship."

"Will it work?"

"We're about to find out."

The Captain knew that there was no time and they would have called it a last stand, but if the Spartan came up with a plan that could end this battle quickly and ensure that his people would survive the coming storm then he would chance it, he gave his permission and contacted a number of still functioning ships to punch a hole through the Battleship's defense fleet and several responded as well as a

number of fighters.

The Spartan and Hibiki took to space and were now surrounded by a handful of Melanos cruisers and also a good number of Melanos Fighters, Mikage was also among them being one of the squadron leaders, Sera and the others wished them luck in this mission and both of them knew they were going to need it.

The Cruisers were now being hit hard, but they pushed on and the fighters fought off the Cube Fighters to cover both the Spartan and Hibiki as their strike team closed the gap with the ships providing ample cover, one badly damaged cruiser took several more hits before it peeled away from the strike team to hold off the Cube Fighters as well as the Seed Ships and the Urchin Ships while it's crew and fighters fought on until they were overwhelmed, the Spartan told them to hold steady and keep moving to the ship as the firestorm intensified and then, when they were close enough to do the damage that he knew they needed to punch through, he gave the order for all forces to unleash their firepower.

The cruisers did so and so did the fighters and their combined assault destroyed a large number of the Battleship's defense fleet and the cruisers fired their weapons full power and then hit the Battleship's hull, the ship was not fazed by the attacks, but the attacks alone had torn a big enough hole for the torpedoes to punch through into the ship. The Spartan tracked their distance and then ordered the cruisers to pull back. The fighters took over and both them and Hibiki escorted the Longsword into the maw as the Cube Fighters were still reeling from the attack. Hibiki cut down several more Cube Fighters and the Melanos Fighters destroyed several more of the Harvester's expendable fighter units while the cruisers were doing a fighting retreat and blasting away at the Cube Fighters and the rest of the Harvester Forces to both escape and lessen the number of forces before the strike team. The Battleship fired at the cruisers with it's weapons and two more were destroyed, but that was when the Spartan fired the missiles and called for everyone to evacuate as quickly as possible.

The fighters and both Longsword and Vanguard high tailed it out of the area as well as the cruisers, but the Longsword and Vanguard were left behind, but the Spartan had a plan and told the rest to keep moving as the Cube Fighters, Seed Ships and Urchin ships kept on coming towards them in their retreat. The other Melanos forces held on and supported the retreat from the Harvester Battleship

The Harvesters had no idea that the torpedoes that were fired into the Battleship were not the regular kind of torpedoes and were quickly showing that fact as their sides opened and then the football sized nuclear grenades were quickly spread out all over the ship as the delivery mechanisms had small booster casings that were armed with small thrusters controlled by dumb AI and that was enough to evenly spread the TacNukes all over the ship's vast interior.

As soon as every TacNuke was deployed and their timers reached zero the devastation started, because the release system gave the nukes enough time to be evenly spaced out to cause maximum damage, the Fury TacNuke would normally be used by UNSC forces to take out bases on the ground or when placed on the Gravity Lift of a shielded Covenant ship, to gut the ship from the inside out. This was because the ship would contain the blast but also cause a great deal of

internal damage to the ship itself. As each TacNuke went boom, the energy they released first created a massive EMP pulse wave as all nuclear weapons were known to do and then the massive release of explosive energy and since the fact that despite looking like an overinflated football, the Fury Tactical Nuclear weapon had the explosive power of more or less a megaton yield, it was more than able to cause devastation despite it's blast range of being only 0.6 km.

The fact that there were forty of these nuclear grenades floating about inside the ship and going off all at once as soon as they timers were active, was more than enough to gut the Harvester Battleship like a can filled with dynamite. The blinding flashes of light followed by the massive heat and blast power made the ship bulge and crack as the nuclear blast energy was spreading out inside the Harvester Battleship and causing massive damage and it was not long before the Harvester Battleship began to thrash about like a wounded animal or a man who had just swallowed a dish so potent that he couldn't help but feel like he was about to barf big time. The Harvester Battleship began to bulge and grow even larger and it was not long before the ship was losing structural integrity and even though the ship was not going boom yetâ€¦the effects of the massive internal damage was evident as the Harvester forces were quickly being shut down and the Melanos forces pounced on this chance and devastated the deactivated Harvester forces.

The Harvester Battleship's frame and design could no longer hold the massive energy that was about to be unleashed as it followed the same pattern as the tulip like ship that Hibiki and Jura dealt with before back over on Anpathosâ€¦only in this case, the ship was being filled to the brim with nuclear energy and the damage to the ship reach critical and then went boomâ€¦

-----

In the Command Bridge of the Melanos Command shipâ€¦

"Incredibleâ€¦"

The Captain and the rest of his crew gaped with amazement as the Harvester Battle Ship was literally blown to shreds in a massive fireball and blast of pure light and the level of destruction was unbelievable for the Harvesters, the Seed Ships and Cube Fighters there were torn apart by the massive explosions and the massive shockwave was enough to send the others that were not in the blast range flying. The Harvester forces were immediately deactivated and rendered powerless as their main source of command and control was destroyed.

In less than twelve minutes, the fierce fighting had quickly turned to the side of the human race, all through the efforts of two men who apparently had risked it all in order to win it for the human race in their darkest hour. He quickly ordered his crew to start scanning the area before them to find any trace of their new found allies.

"Is there any sign of them?!"

"Negative sir, the massive amount of debris and energy in the area is too thick for us to get a proper reading on what happened. There's a

good chance that they might have beenâ€|"

The Captain dared not to believe it, the Spartan and his young protégé can't possibly be dead before his eyes!

"Scan again to be sure! We can't let it end like this!"

The crew agreed and tried as best they could to send out their fighters and scanners but they could find nothing, there was just too much debris out there for them to get any proper scanner readings and after several more fruitless searches, the Captain's hope to find the two heroes faded and he had no choice but to order his ships to pull out and regroup. However, he and the rest of the crew and the survivors of his people were not going to forget the actions of the two men who they had only met hours before. Their efforts had bought their people plenty of time to counter the Harvesters and severely weaken them, the loss of a Battle Ship would throw the Harvester forces in absolute disarray and give their people time to gather the resources and materials needed to mount a full scale counter attack and defense.

.He also vowed never to forget the men's sacrifice for their lives and vowed to tell the story far and wide about the noble actions of two brave young men who risked everything for the human race in this universe. He gave the order for all ships to pull back and regroup, as well as gather all salvageable ships, equipment, and fighters as well as any still intact harvester ships for salvage and study to look for weaknesses that their forces could exploit at the soonest possible time, with all that done, he then turned and he turned to his crew.

"We must never forget what happened here today, two men who were from other worlds have given their lives to fight the Harvesters and they had shown us that we should never give up, and fight no matter the odds. We will honor their names for as long as we live, and we will make the Harvesters pay not just their lives but the lives of all that have suffered because of them."

The crew nodded and as they got to work, the Captain turned and gave a salute to the people who had sacrificed their lives to ensure the survival of his people and in effect, the human race from the Harvesters, and he recalled the advice of the Spartan to him.

I will never forget what you have told me John-117, and I will never forget you or Hibiki Tokai for as long as I hold breathe and blood in my body, we will defend out people to the end.

With that, the Melanos Fleet gathered their wounded forces and returned home, carrying bitter sweet news of their victory and the loss of many people as well as the deaths of two famous heroes in the war for the freedom and survival of the human race. Mikage and Sera who were back together and reunited after the vicious fighting much to their relief had the same sentiment in mind as well.

However, both Hibiki and John were alive, the Spartan had burned the engines of his Longsword to the limit and so did Hibiki in his Vanguard, but they were able to use the remains of the Harvester forces and the Melanos forces, using the debris to buffer the blast and also shield them from as much of the EMP blast as well. Their machines needed to recover and Hibiki was exhausted and asleep,



leaving John to watch over them, the energy unleashed would lure the Nirvana here to them so all they could hope for was wait.

-----

End of Flashbackâ€|

Buzam was wide eyed at the Spartan and spoke out her amazement.

"You fired two missiles containing at least forty FURY TacNuke nukes in there?!"

The Spartan shrugged and replied.

"It was the only option we had at the time and the results were worthy it Commander, besides, there was no way that the FURY TacNukes would have worked had we fired them from the outside. The missile container system was the best way to distribute the TacNukes evenly into the ship to maximize full damage, plus the massive EMP blast would completely disable the ship's systems and cripple the rest of the Harvester force."

"And you managed to escape using the debris of the Harvester Seed, Urchin and Cube ships?"

"Yes, we also had to power down all essential systems to preserve them to make sure we'd make it, thankfully we had no need to deactivate life support and communications and that was what saved our lives at that moment."

Magno thought about all that she had been told and knew that this information could prove to be the key they needed to beat the Harvesters, the Spartan had been able to defeat the Harvesters and struck a major blow to the enemy and there was no doubt in her mind that the Harvester leadership would be fuming mad at this turn of events. She then faced the Master Chief and Hibiki, marveling at the two men and knew that now was the time to plan and prepare, they had little time and with Rabat telling the Harvesters of what had happened, there was no doubt that the Harvesters would be furious with them.

She then spoke to the Spartan.

"Do you think they'll be coming after us next?"

The Spartan nodded.

"That's a big possibility Ma'am, there is no doubt in my mind that once they hear of the loss of their Battle ship in the attempt to harvest the skins of the Melanos People, they will do everything in their power to avenge the loss, and they will target us for that. The Harvesters don't see us as a thorn to their side anymore Ma'am, they are no doubt going to do everything they possibly can in order to destroy us as quickly as possible before we become too much of an influence over the other human worlds, and I have no doubts that we have scored a major loss for them, losing a planet full of resources is one thing, and so is the defeat of a Harvesting force back on Talvernâ€|.but the destruction of an entire Battle Ship is something else entirely."

Magno and Buzam nodded with the Spartan's assessment, they had a lot of planning to do from here on out.

-----

In the Harvester home worldâ€¦.

The news had arrived of the defeat of their battle ship and the overall losses in the operation and in line with the Spartan's thoughts on the matter, the Harvesters were Far from pleased.

"WHAT?!"

The Council shouted in absolute shock and in unison as well as the report from Rabat came in as well as the reports from the battle field, and to say that they were shocked by the news was an understatement of epic proportions. The underling that brought them the news cowered at their glares and replied in a very shaky voice.

"We have confirmed it Master, the Battleship we assigned to the Melanos Harvesting operation in that sector was utterly destroyed and is no longer salvageable for use, that and all the forces in it's support fleet have been annihilated."

"The Melanos people destroyed ONE of our Battleships?!"

"No way, they do not have the numbers or the fire power for such a feat!"

"Master, we have gathered data from the Battleship before it was destroyed, it seemed that the operation was going as planned when the Melanos people launched a counter attack aimed right at the Battleship and then they deployed a number of their forces to launch a suicide attack on the battleship, the Battleship's defenses were able to beat them but not before a squadron of fighters were able to attack and then one of them fired a pair of large missiles into the ship which resulted in the destruction of the Battleship."

"Impossible! Do you expect us to believe that TWO puny missiles destroyed ONE Battleship?!"

"They were not ordinary missiles Master, the last recording from the Battleship's internal scanners showed that they carried nuclear weapons in them, the weapons were spread out evenly through the ship and the resulting combined detonation ensured that the Battleship would be easily torn to shreds from the inside out."

Nuclear weapons?! How can the Melanos people even have nuclear weapons?! Rabat's reports state that the Melanos people had no such weapons in their arsenals!"

"There was more Masterâ€¦.it seemed that the Melanos had supportâ€¦.in the shape of the Spartan. Rabat attempted to deal with him and the boy whose Vanguard created the VanDreads, but they were rescued by the Nirvana."

The Council were shocked and enraged to know that the Spartan and his allies on the Nirvana had handed them yet another bloody defeat, the loss of their Harvesting forces on Talvern was bad enough, the loss of their ship over Anpathos was also bad enough as well as the loss of the ground strike team, and then the loss of one of their resource planets and the time needed to rebuild there had chafed them. But this loss of a battleship and it's support fleet was too much!

"Have one of our battleships focus on destroying the Nirvana once and for all! Are the new counters to the Vanguard's ready?!"

"Yes they are Master!"

"Then send them out to destroy the Nirvana, it is high time they were dealt with, we can no longer ignore them!!! THEY MUST DIE!!!!!"

-----

Out in space, a new Harvester Battleship was awakened to accomplish the will of it's creators to annihilate the Nirvana once and for all, and in a hanger bay area inside of it, there were three new weapons ready to bring on the destruction.

-----

In the Nirvana

The news that was delivered to them was very worrying for all the people on the Nirvana, the thought of having to face a Harvester Battleship, something that none of them had ever fought before was certainly troubling to all the people on the ship. They had no idea how deadly that ship was and seeing the destruction one Battleship and it's support fleet could accomplish made many of the crew uneasy with how to defeat such a monster of an enemy and it's forces, there was also a chance that the Harvesters would have developed new weapons in which to fight them, their experience with the Harvesters' ground forces told them that much, if they had such a varied army for ground battles, what was to stop the Harvesters from developing weapons for space combat.

But the fact that both Hibiki and the Master Chief as well as the Melanos people had made a highly risky yet successful concerted effort to defeat one ship, there were those on the Nirvana that felt that they can still win this if they planned something, but even they wondered how they could defeat this massive monster of a ship. So far there had been no sightings of the supposed Harvester Fleet, but they needed to do something in order to defeat the Harvesters when they showed up, they could do little if they stayed here for a long time.

They also had to deal with the fact that there was gas giant in the area as well and it was in the early stages of turning into a star and therefore it was releasing a great deal of gravity as well

It was then that Hibiki had a stellar idea—it was risky,, it was insane, and it could only work if everything was done down to spec—but it was the only option they had at that moment. And they had a chance to make this work since all they needed to deal with the Harvesters was already there with them and all they had to do was

lure them in.

-----

In the Planning Room of the Nirvana

"That is insane!!!!"

One of the Dread pilots commented as Hibiki outlined his plan as the rest of the crew gathered together and all of them had to admit that Hibiki's plan was beyond crazy, it was borderline mad. The only ones who were not thinking that Hibiki had blown a gasket was his mentor and Cortana as the woman in her AI form looked on.

Hibiki however was confident of his plan, he had thought it over ever since he had stared at the gas giant that the Nirvana was close to and he recalled some things he had read about concerning celestial bodies such as a gas giant.

"Listen, this can work, it's risky, it's crazy, and it's mad, but the harvesters would never think we'd actually do it, that's our advantage. Besides, if we take advantage of the fact that the Harvesters would be eager to destroy us, we could hide in the gas giant force them all to gather in one place and then once the gas giant goes into turning into a star then we can destroy them all in one fell swoop, if we tried to fight them outside, we'd be overwhelmed, this way we can trap them all in one spot. We'll have the Dread squadrons and the Longswords as well as some AI controlled Vanguard teams engage the Harvesters as well as Cortana having fired several shots from her Archer Missiles once that happens, we fight them for as long as we can manage and then make a full retreat into the gas giant."

"Once we're inside, several Dreads including Dita's, Meia's, and Barnette's will fire up the core of the gas giant and feed it energy so we can make it collapse and transform itself into the core of a star. Then me and Jura will fly out of our machines with several Longswords armed to the teeth with all the fire power we can spare as well as upgraded with gravity shield generator parts from the Register, once we face them, Jura and I combine our forces and form VanDread Jura to create the outer shell to hold everything into play until the core reacts the way we need it too. once we're in the clear, all of us escape through the Harvester ranks

Magno turned to Cortana and John.

"Do you think it will work?"

Cortana replied.

"I'm not really all that sure Captain, but considering the sheer power of a star being born, we're definitely going to be skirting the edges of insanity. But so far this idea seems to be workable and it's a big risk, no doubts about that, but if we pull it off, it will be worth every moment."

Magno nodded and Buzam nodded as well, the Commander of the pirates had to admit that this plan cooked up by the young Tarak teen was something that seemed to be borderline insane, no one as far as she knew had ever tried to create a star, let alone use it as weapon, but

if it worked, it could very well be their salvation. The elderly leader of the pirates looked about and spoke.

"This plan is risky, and dangerous to the extreme, had things been different, I would never recommend it to be used for any reason. But we have no choice, none of us have ever seen the destruction

As the others got to work, both Cortana and the Master Chief looked at Hibiki and the former UNSC AI spoke to Hibiki.

"You are really starting to amaze me Hibiki, to actually suggest we turn this gas giant into a star so we can wipe the Harvesters out in one fell swoop, I think John here is having some of his personality rub off on you."

Hibiki grinned and then faced his mentor and guardian.

"Do you think it'll work sir?"

The Spartan grinned a bit in his helmet and replied.

"It's a risky plan Hibiki, but if we do it right, it can work perfectly. This is by far your daring plan yet."

Hibiki nodded and he got to work as the others got to work as well.

-----

The Nirvana's crews did their best to be prepared for the worst and to place Hibiki's plan into action, Parfait and her engineering teams worked nonstop to get the upgrades on the Vanguard's and the Longswords as well. They installed special COM and control systems into the Vanguard's, namely the regular ones and the modified Vanguard's as well and the Longswords as well.

Cortana helped in the process and was able to test the systems of the Vanguard's by studying the operation data and footage of the Vanguard's in use and she tested her skills by running through several Vanguard training simulations for space warfare. She did all this while in her holo tank and when she finished, she said that while it was kind of weird to be doing those motions in the holo-tank to control the Vanguard's, she was more than ready and eager to give them a go.

Bart was also told of the plan and he also thought it was crazy, but he was then told by Hibiki that he had an important part in this plan, he would have to handle the control of the ship's navigation systems and was needed to coordinate the escape, if was not at one hundred percent, they would not make it out in time, in effect, he realized that the lives of all the crew were in his hands and they needed him to be at his best. Bart was overwhelmed and decided to train as best he could and relax himself for the soon to come battle.

As soon as they were able to make the needed changes to their forces for Hibiki's risky and daring plan, they were informed that the Clarion Spy Drones had located the Harvester forces and the long range scans from the drones told them that there was indeed a Harvester Battleship with them and that told the pirates that it was game time.

-----

It was then that the bridge crew got a message from the Harvesters, and Magno nodded for them to play it. And it was not long before they were able to hear the Harvesters for the first time.

"LOWER YOUR SHIELDS AND SURRENDER YOURSELVESâ€|RESISTANCE IS POINTLESS."

The ancient woman nodded, this was the chance to find out who or what these monsters really are. "Who are you?"

The voice answered.

"WE ARE FROM THE PLANET KNOWN AS EARTH."

"Earth?! The very same world that all our ancestors had come from? That's impossible! If you are from Earth, then why have you been hunting us?"

"WE ARE THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN SPECIES. YOUR ORGANS WILL KEEP US ALL ALIVE FOR MANY YEARS TO COME AND WE THANK YOU FOR THEM. WHETHER YOU AGREE TO THIS OR NOT IS NO LONGER YOUR DECISION TO MAKE. YOU ALL SHALL BE HARVESTED TO ENSURE OUR EXISTENCEâ€| PREPARE YOURSELVES."

-----

Throughout the whole ship and in space, the pirates and the men were shocked, to hear that the Harvesters were from Earth was terrifying, but The Master Chief and Hibiki were not convinced at all, and neither was Cortana. They knew humanity in many ways, Hibiki had learned that while humanity was not perfect but it was worth fighting for, he had learned that much from his time with everyone here and growing up under the Spartan's training and teachings.

The Spartan spoke then to the others.

"They may be from Earth, but they aren't human anymore, do humans willingly destroy other human worlds for their own survival, treat people like animals, there might have been people like that in the past but there had been just as many people who would never agree to this kind of madness."

Hibiki also spoke.

"That's right! What right do they have to say that we have no say in the matter, we're human beings as well, we have the right to be alive, we have the right to survive and the right to exist! Who are they to judge us?! We are here and we are free, I won't let these monsters judge me and dictate my life for me!"

Cortana agreed, no human being would willingly subject others to the horrors that the Harvesters had done, they may be from Earth, but what they had done was obvious to her, they had become mindless beasts concerned with their own survival and not caring for the future, at least with the pirates she had seen that humanity could still pull through. The people of Earth were no longer human, they were now the enemy.

The same sentiment filled the pirates and while it had shocked them they were not going to follow the orders of the Harvesters, they would stand and fight!!!

-----

As the Dreads got ready for the battle, the Longswords came out to aid them and these fighters were fully loaded with as much fire power as could be spared at the moment and were even modified to carry laser weapons to augment their fire power. The Dread squadron pilots knew that what they were going to do was very risky and they had to be ready for anything at this moment.

Meia checked her teams and gave the orders to them all.

"All right, we're going to follow Hibiki's plan to the letter girls, we fight the Harvesters and draw them closer to us and then when we reach the point of action, we are to pull back and initiate a fighting retreat back to the Nirvana, no heroics, we have to make the Harvesters follow us and then get to surround the gas giant for the second phase of the plan to work. Teams A and B will handle the engagement while Teams C and D will handle defense of the Nirvana under Jura, everyone got that?"

"Yes Meia!"

Meia then got a communiqué from Jura as the blonde spoke to her comrade. They had reconfigured the COM systems of their Dreads to make sure that there was little chance the Harvesters could hack them, it was a bit more tedious, but it paid in spades and that was what counted in this mission

"I hope Hibiki's plan works, this reminds me of the time he had used our Dreads' shield to redirect his shots to free us from that ambush in the asteroid belt a few months ago. But whoever thought we'd use a plan to turn a gas giant into a star and use it to defeat the Harvesters? That's got to be a first."

Meia nodded.

"He's certainly a free thinker that much is for sure. He's become VERY interesting ever since the Master Chief took him in for training, right Meia?"

Meia agreed, Hibiki had changed a great deal.

"He has indeed."

Dita then joined in and spoke.

"Mr. Alien is so amazing, we can do this!"

Both women couldn't help but chuckle at Dita's enthusiasm and they all nodded.

It was go time.

Cortana and Bart got ready on their stations as the master Chief ordered all those of his Fire Teams and the Talvernians to get ready

to be treating the wounded, they needed to heal as many of the soon to come injuries as well as repelling the possible Harvester Boarding parties which would be heading straight for them.

As soon as everyone was ready, the harvesters showed up and sure enough, they brought a Battleship with them and the pirates gasped as they saw the thing before them, Jura recoiled at the sight of the ugly sea cucumber like ship and Dita spoke.

"They have something like that?! Those are really BAD aliens!!!"

Hibiki however snorted and spoke as he was in the bridge.

"That thing is not invincible, and neither are the Harvesters, we've beaten them before and we can do so again."

As soon as those words came from Hibiki, the Dread pilots were warned by their scanners that the Harvester forces were attacking them and the battle was on. Missile vapor trails were seen as well as energy bolts were sent out and were colliding on either side as the battle proved to be a very serious one. The pirates knew that they had to lure the Harvesters closer to the gas giant, but they also knew that they had to do as much damage as they could in order to thin down the numbers before them, the plan would be of little use if they didn't hurl the Harvesters enough.

And hurt them they did as they poured on all that they had, the Longswords opened up their own weaponry as their missiles and auto cannon rounds were unleashed on the Harvesters and they revealed that they were now armed with plasma cannons and laser canons, courtesy of Parfait and her crew as well as larger missile pods ensuring that the Longswords carried more than enough firepower for this fight.

The battle grew more intense as Cortana unleashed a massive barrage of Archer Missiles from the pods and also fired out the rounds from the 50mm Point Defense Guns when the Cube Fighters got too close to the ship when they were able to break through the lines of the Dread squadrons under Jura's command, The Boarding Craft were able to make it through despite heavy casualties on their forces, but they were quickly greeted by the Talvernians and the Nirvana Fire Teams and the fighting was getting from bad to worse at least for the Harvesters at this moment as the Nirvana crews knew that they would have to move back and let themselves get within range of the gravity well of the gas giant.

Cortana then unleashed two MAC rounds that slammed hard into the Harvester Battleship and that was something the Harvester Battleship didn't expect as it was hit by the explosive force of the shots and the Harvester forces in the path of the two Mac rounds were easily destroyed in a heart beat. Cortana was an accurate shooter with the Mac round and since she was in her Smart AI form, she was more than able to do these shots easily.

In the Nirvana itself, the Master Chief was now armed with a M90A Shotgun and his trusty MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and led his forces to launch counter attacks against the Harvester Shock Troopers who had made their way into the Nirvana, they were defend as much of the Nirvana as they could and while there were injuries, some near fatal,



the Fire teams and their allies held on and the Spartan had racked up yet another large number of kills, while the ones who had been wounded were quickly evacuated for medical treatment. The hallways were covered the magenta 'blood' of the Harvester Shock Troopers and the Fire Teams did their best as the Master Chief blasted a close range blast that literally tore the Harvester Shock Trooper charging him in half with one blast, spilling even more of the magenta fluid all over the place.

It was not long in the battle that the Nirvana crew and their Talvernian allies were greeted by the sight of the three new weapons of the Harvesters.

The machines were like the VanDreads, but radiated an evil corrupted aura around them. The copy of VanDread Dita looked more insidious and menacing than the original and had a massively powerful laser cannon mounted on one shoulder. It was also equipped with massive energy blade/claws on the forearms.

The copy of VanDread Meia resembled a crimson beast and looked more avian than dragon. It flapped it's wings like it was a living thing and to the left of the Copy GunDread Dita. On the right, a twisted grotesque version of Jura's VanDread showed it's visage. It seemed to be a cross between Jura's Dread and it's crab form, but it had huge pincer limbs in front, which were filled with massive teeth, giving this latest horror the look of a giant beetle.

"How ugly they are!"

"They're all copies!"

"Ewww! I don't like the looks of this!"

In a moment the Copy VanDreads attacked their Nirvana counterparts who were not transformed, and the fight became even more intense. Meia found that despite her own non-transformed Dread's exceptional speed, the Copy VanDread Meia was running rings around her fighter, and took multiple potshots at her with every pass. Jura tried desperately, but had no success in busting through her own clone's shielding, even when she fired in point blank range. As for Dita, her Dread was totally no match for her Copy's overall firepower. The other Dreads and Longswords were too embroiled in battle with the other Harvester forces to lend a hand to their besieged comrades. However they knew that this was a sign that the Harvesters were getting desperate to destroy them, they were not going to back down and be defeated just yet, and the same could be said for the three Dread pilots as they fought on Gascogne used the Dreki and she was escorted by Longsword to recover the downed Dread pilots, preventing their capture by the Harvesters.

It was not long before Meia was hurt in a fight with her foe and her Dread was badly damaged but still able to be fixed as well.

"MEIA!!!"

Meia managed to bit through the pain of her shoulder wound and spoke.

"I'm all right! Move back quickly!!!"

It was then that Hibiki nodded to Magno and Magno and Buzam gave the order.

"All forces prepare for the next phase of the operation!"

That was the signal and Meia, despite her injury ordered a full retreat for all forces while the Longsword divided themselves into two groups, one to escort the Dreads and the other to hold off the Harvesters for the retreat action.

Magno nodded and called it out.

"Bart! Get ready to move!!!"

"Roger!!!"

The blonde navigator wasted no time as the Dreads and supporting Longswords made it back to the Nirvana and Cortana fired several more salvos of fire and another MAC round before she gave the all clear for him to floor it. Bart wasted no time and dived towards the gas giant and that would give them time to do as many repairs as they could spare and treat the wounded before setting in motion Hibiki's next plan as the Longswords outside were obliterated and the Harvesters were in full pursuit. Gascogne's ship made it through with all the pilots including Meia's Dread that was rescued.

The Harvesters made the mistake of moving in after the Nirvana and several Seed, Cube Fighters and some Urchins were crushed and Harvester Copy of VanDread Meia was crushed as it thrashed like a bird in a cage, the Copy of Jura's VanDread used it's shields and escaped with the others. The Harvesters then stayed there, waiting for the pirates, if they moved out, they would be destroyed and if they remained there, they would die from the radiation and gravity

Victory would be theirs at last

Or was it?

-----

In the gas giant

The Nirvana was trying to endure the massive pressures of the gravity well of the gas giant as well as boost it's shields to prevent radiation from filtering into the ship. Most people would have panicked and lost themselves to despair, but the Nirvana crew had planned ahead and they were already on the move, Parfait and her crew deployed a Vanguard with the shield systems installed as well as one Longsword with the same upgrades and once the two machines showed that they could handle it, the rest of the modified Vanguards and Longswords took to the battle field and were now ready to even up the odds.

Meia was healed and was ready for the next step of the plan Hibiki had cooked up and with her Dread fully repaired and ready, it was game time.

The Master Chief checked on his teams and the Talvernians and gave

the thumbs up that they were ready and the wounded were not in danger at this moment and time. That was enough for Magno to give the order and Buzam had the crew get ready for what was going to be one hell of a ride, they knew that if Bart was too slow on his movements, the Nirvana would be caught in the storm of fire from the newly created star and that was something they were all not in the mood to happen anytime soon.

Hibiki was also getting ready as he powered up his vanguard and touched the cockpit and knew that this was going to be a very difficult part of the mission, he and Jura would have to pray that the shield they had with their VanDread would hold itself steady, but as he got ready, he got a communicuÃ© from a certain red haired Dread pilot.

"Dita? What's wrong? I thought I explained the â€|"

"It's not that Mr. Alien, I'm just worriedâ€|.about youâ€|.Iâ€|"

Hibiki sighed and replied.

"I'll be fine okay, you don't have to worry about meâ€|."

"But I doâ€|.I want you to promise me something."

Hibiki wondered what this was all about and spoke.

"All right, what do you want me to promise you Dita?"

"I want you to come to my room."

Hibiki's eyes widened at that and he couldn't help but feel very confused by what Dita had requested of him, not only was that request highly unexpected for him to hear but somehow, the request seemed to stir feelings in him that confused him a good deal, and he had no idea how to deal with them at the moment and they had far more serious concerns to deal with than this.

"Can't this wait for a betterâ€|?"

"No it can't Mr. Alien! Pleaseâ€|.you have to promise me now!"

Hibiki could see that Dita wanted to hear it and decided to just do it now.

"All right, I promise."

Dita smiled brightly and wished him luck as she got to doing her own task for the rest of the plan that he had cooked up for this situation. He relaxed himself and got word that Jura was ready and that was enough to spur him into action as the place was now underway.

-----

As Jura and Hibiki moved out, they were escorted by a wing of Longswords and Vanguarders and those were first to break through the gas giant and then engaged the Harvesters, surprising the AI

controlled forces as they were expecting the Nirvana pirates and their allies to try and fight their way out in what would appear to be a defiant last stand for them to crush them utterly.

However, they only saw the Dread of Jura and Hibiki's Vanguard and both of them fused as one and created the VanDread that had a powerful shield system, the Longswords and the Vanguards formed a defensive patten around the VanDread and that told the Harvesters that something was going on, but their orders were clear, hunt down and destroy the pirates and their allies as well as the Spartan, these people had been a threat for too long. it was here and now in this sector of space that their threat to the plans of their masters was going to end with their absolute destruction.

Unknown to the Harvesters, the Nirvana had dispatched three more Dreads instead of just Jura's Dread. Meia, Dita, and Barnette were already moving to the core of the gas giant and fired their beams into it to begin feeding it energy, Barnette was surprised by the request for her to be part of the team, but since Hibiki said that they all needed her help, she agreed, after seeing Hibiki become who he was now and the Spartan proving to be a great leader, as well as Duero being a skilled doctor made her more tolerant of them, which was why she agreed, and she knew that it was needed as well.

All three Dreads had their shields at full power and then they were in position and they fed the energy to the core, bringing it to the point needed to turn it into the core of a new star. As they went to work, Dita hoped and prayed that Hibiki would be all right.

-----

Outside

The battle was getting even more tense but the Tarak youth held his own while the Longsword and Vanguards under Cortana's command was doing their best to hold off the Harvesters. The Vanguards, being built for close combat as well as long range combat with the right weaponry were more than able to hold their own with the Harvesters with Cortana handling them and it was not long before the final phase of the battle would be under way.

Jura did her best to remain cool but Hibiki could tell that she was worried and he placed his hand on her shoulder and she saw him smile.

"We can do this Jura!"

Jura couldn't help but smile back and nod.

"Right!"

-----

The Nirvana

"Estimated time to core chain-reaction is now at seven minutes and fifty three seconds." Ezra called out.

Buzam kept her cool as best she could and knew that she had to trust

both Hibiki and Jura at this moment and hour. Magno thought the same as she and everyone on the Nirvana waited for the right moment to make their move, Bart was eager and ready to spring, Cortana was also ready to come out swinging and had her MAC Canons loaded.

-----

Hibiki checked the timer as Jura and him sent more power to hold the shield, many of the Harvesters were destroyed by the arsenals of both the modified Vanguard and Longswords while they suffered losses, Cortana assured them she would be fine and that was enough for everyone as the Vanguard proved their worth as close combat was what they were made to do as the unleashed blades, missiles, heavy bullets, Gauss Rounds, flames and lasers, while the Longswords unleashed missiles, auto-cannon rounds and lasers as well as modified MORAY Space Mines that were sent around like grenades that further added to the destruction.

-----

The Nirvana's bridgeâ€|

"Estimated time for planet core chain-reaction is now at four minutes and ten seconds."

Ezra called out.

"VanDread Jura is taking heavy damage. Longsword and Vanguard forces are reduced by 20% numbers"

Celtic called out through her sensors.

(Hang in there Hibikiâ€|you too Jura.)

Buzam silently prayed.

-----

At the planet's coreâ€|

"We're almost there, keep on feeding the power to the core!" Meia commanded.

It was then that Dita made a mistake and Meia corrected her and then gave a reprimand

"Dita! Don't lose focus here! Don't get carried away and focus on your job!" Meia scolded.

"Sorry!"

Dita gulped a bit at her leader's stern expression and reprimand, but then Barnette called in with a smile on her face over her other monitor.

"Ditaâ€|just do your best, all right?"

Dita perked up and nodded.

"Right!"

-----

Outsideâ€|

"This place is getting dicey!"

Jura spoke as the blonde saw that their escorts were running out of weaponry and some Vanguard's used their close combat blades to fight with while some Longswords just plowed through them and exploded, unleashing powerful blasts that further damaged the Cube Fighters and Seed Ships.

It was then that the two spotted the two Copy VanDreads coming at them and Jura gasped.

"Not now!!!"

Hibiki gritted his teeth and wished there was some way to get rid of the pests and then Cortana contacted him.

"Hibiki! Feed me the coordinate data on where those Copy VanDreads are! And when you do lower the shield a bit so I can fire a MAC round at them!" Hibiki did so and Cortana had a number of Longswords and Vanguard's engage the two VanDread Copies, while some were lost, the others were able to weaken the two for as long as possible and when she got the coordinates, she opened up and called him to lower the section of the shields.

Cortana took aim and spoke.

"Time to get rid of the copies!"

The Nirvana's middle MAC Cannon fired and moved right past the shield without harming VanDread Jura at all and the two Copies had mere nano-seconds before they were smashed by the MAC round, the VanDread Dita Copy was blown to shreds and the copy of VanDread Jura was unable to shield itself in time and was torn apart by the impact, the MAC round also tore apart even more Cube Fighters and Seed Ships as well as Urchin Ships for they were all over the place and the round smashed right into the Harvester Battleship with great force.

Hibiki and Jura whooped and Jura spoke to Cortana.

"Now THAT was an awesome shot!"

Cortana smiled and replied.

"Thank you Jura."

"Thanks Cortana! Now we can get back to working without anymore disturbances!"

"No problem!"

-----

"T-minus two minutes and countingâ€|" Ezra announced.

It was then that the news they all had been waiting for had finally come true.

"They did it!" Belvedere declared as the energy readings of the planet's core went off the scale.

Magno wasted no time in barking out commands,

"Barnette, head back to the Nirvana now! Meia, Dita, execute the next stage of the operation! Bart, Get us out of here now! Cortana, clear the deck!!"

"ROGER!"

Everyone said as the pirate vessel moved away from the core. Cortana got ready and as soon as Hibiki opened away the shields, the Nirvana moved through and Cortana opened up once more, unleashing 50mm rounds and Archer missiles as the Nirvana moved through the gas giant at stop speed.

-----

Hibiki nodded to Jura and she nodded back with a smile and spoke to him.

"You be careful Hibiki."

"Always!"

The two broke their VanDread and Hibiki moved his Vanguard to fuse with Meia's Dread and formed VanDread Meia. Jura flew off to rendezvous to the Nirvana and then VanDread Meia took center stage and used it's claws to latch on to Dita's Dread and went at top speed. Behind them was a massive solar flare from the newly made star. Kyo and Meia had planned to use the power of the solar prominence to wipe out the enemy battleship with one shot. By manipulating the energy output of the chain-reaction, they were able to control one of the flares towards their intended target.

The Nirvana was clear, but things were not going to be easy.

-----

"We're heading towards an asteroid belt!" Amarone called out as the Nirvana sped through space with Harvester ships in fast pursuit despite the killing Cortana made with the 50mm Point defense Guns and the Archer Missiles.

Behind them was one massive solar flare as the star spewed them all out like a volcano in various directions, theirs' included! A massive majority of the enemy fleet was turned into molten slag and the flames were singing the ship's stern, placing Bart literally in the proverbial hot seat.

"YOW! YOW! HOT! HOT! HOT!"

Buzam wasted no time as she took one of the navigation stations and ordered all maneuvering thrusters switched to manual. She began directing the Nirvana through the relation to Bart's movements. With

a little luck and some real good piloting they were able to avoid colliding with any more incoming chunks of ice and rock, and any other solar flares.

Cortana turned to Bart and replied.

"Not bad there Bart, I recommend you don't sit down for a bit though."

"No kidding, we are NOT going to do that again are we?"

-----

Hibiki was tired but was not giving up, he sucked up his exhaustion and both he and Meia were heading towards the Harvester battleship and with all the harvester forces around them reduced into slag, there was little stopping them at this moment. The VanDread glowed as it accelerated at full speed and sliced through the opposition easily and was now ready to fight with the main Harvester ship. Hibiki then spoke to Dita.

"Dita! Get Ready! It's our turn next!"

"Right Mr. Alien!"

Meia knew that now was the time for them to move away, but she spoke to Hibiki first.

"Don't die yet Hibiki, come back alive."

"I don't plan on dying today or any other day for that matter, I'll be all right."

Meia nodded at that and made her move, in moments the two separated and Meia made her way to join with the others and then both Hibiki and Dita formed their VanDread and then had the two cannons be unlatched and fused into a double bladed lance and then they got ready and with a mighty heave, tossed the weapon right at the Harvester battleship that tried to fire back with its main canon, but as the lance was hit, it was boosted by the energy of the solar flare and overpowered the weapon system of the Harvester Battleship. Hibiki and Dita got out of the way of the flare and watched as it smashed the Harvester ship dead center

The hit was explosive in both visual effect and actual effect. The projectile rocketed forward and slammed right into the centre of the Earth battleship, piercing it like a piece of paper. The energy of the solar flare leaped through the hole and made total havoc on the insides, literally cooking the ship from the inside. Suddenly the whole vessel was caught in one massive explosion.

-----

Onboard the Nirvana, there was a resonating cheer as the enemy was engulfed in the explosion and what appeared to be their grandest victory. Magno and Buzam congratulated one another for a job well done—however, before the celebrations can begin, something massive came out of the explosion in the centre.



"No! It can't be!"

"Those Earth bastards are really tenacious." Magno said as she watched and felt her blood run cold.

-----

Hibiki glared at them and knew that something like this might happen, but he had an idea, and that involved a risky move that required him to use the solar wave coming at them from behind.

-----

"Dita, Hibiki, get out of there now!"

Magno cried out, but it was too late. The energy wave overtook the VanDread causing the mecha to disappear from the monitors on the bridge.

In the navigation well, Bart moaned in despair.

"Stupid. None of this will mean anything if you die."

However, the communications began receiving a message in static.

"Whoâ€|(bzzzt)â€|.said anything aboutâ€|(squark!)â€| me dying?"

"Huh?"

Cortana looked at her scanners and smiled.

"I'll be damnedâ€|"

-----

The VanDread rocketed out, coated in powerful solar energy, Hibiki had reconfigured the systems of the VanDread to take in pure solar energy into itself and converted itself into the spear point of yet ANOTHER solar flare and as soon as Hibiki and Dita' rocketed through the maw of the Harvester Battleship that took on the form of a massive slug with teeth, the energy incinerated it once more and in that moment, it exploded like a fire cracker and this timeâ€|

It was deadâ€|for sure as well.

The Nirvana crew and everyone cheered as they had done yet another set of impossible things, they had created a new star by themselves, and they had destroyed ANOTHER Harvester Battleship.

Inside the cockpit, Kyo gave into exhaustion and battle fatigue. The VanDread powered down as it lowered it's arms.

"Finallyâ€|it's over."

He promptly went to sleep. Dita looked at him and smiled, letting Hibiki sleep for the time being, he had done so much for them and he deserved to get some much needed rest and relaxation, and then he could visit her room.

-----

In the Nirvana Hanger Bayâ€|

Hibiki woke up and found himself inside his Vanguard's cockpit and still wearing his Marine Body Armor, wondering how he was still in his partner's cockpit. The sensors told him that he was in the main hanger and he decided to get out and meet up with the crew. However as soon as Hibiki got out of the cockpit, he was warmly greeted by Dita and Juraâ€|

"WELCOME BACK!" Both girls exclaimed.

"Huh?"

Behind them was a crowd of females that also chorused the greeting.

"WELCOME BACK!"

The Talvernians were also there and they too were also in high spirits and in the front were both Cortana and the Master Chief.

Hibiki went forward and nearly stumbled as Jura caught him in her arms and began kissing him vigorously.

"YOU WERE SO INCREDIBLE! I SIMPLY CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU SAVED ALL OF US!"

She then tried to kiss Hibiki even more. Immediately, Hibiki was taken away from Jura's arms by Dita.

"Hey! Keep your hands off Mr. Alien!"

That made Jura rather annoyed. "What are you so worked up for Dita? I was thanking him for saving us all!"

Dita shook her head and held Hibiki even tighter.

"YOU CAN THANK MR. ALIEN LATER! HE HAS A PROMISE HE HAS TO KEEP TO ME!"

"What promise is that?!" Jura asked.

At that moment, Pyoro began leaping out warnings. "IT'S NOT OVER YET!"

Hibiki managed to gently and yet firmly removing himself from Dita's grip as he got to the robot.

"What are you getting at now?"

The little Navi-robot began displaying images.

"I've intercepted some of the enemy communications! Earth has learned that we've defeated another of their flagships and their rerouting the others to make their way to Tarak and Megele!"

Jura gasped. "MY GOD! There are five more of those behemoths?!"

This made the entire crew very apprehensive; they had barely succeeded in defeating one of the ships. How could they battle five more?

Hibiki snorted his indifference with the matter, which got everyone's attention.

"What's with all the glum and sad faces? So we have to deal with five more of them, that's just a detail we'll find a way of working out! Every one of us knew that this trip wasn't without danger, we've already taken the first few steps on this path, and I don't see why we should try to walk back. We have chosen this path whether by fate or circumstance, but whatever the case, we're committed to this path until the very end and we're reaching the end soon, so we might as well go all the way to the end, right?"

Hibiki said as he grinned at Dita

The redhead girl nodded and smiled.

"Right!"

The Spartan shook his head at that and so did Cortana as she spoke to the Master Chief.

"You really are rubbing off on him John."

It was then that Parfait called in.

"We've got a situation down here!!"

The Spartan turned and spoke, readying his MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle.

"What is it Parfait?"

"Some sort of portal just appeared in the Paeksis Reactor Room! I don't know what's going on here, but we got the portal when the Paeksis unleashed some sort of powerful energy spike which was off the charts!"

"Understood, All Fire Teams assemble into the Reactor Room!"

-----

In the Paeksis Reactor Roomâ€¦

The Nirvana Fire Teams got ready to fight as they were dressed in their UNSC Marine Body Armor while others were dressed in their Megele Space suits and all of them were well armed, there was also the Master Chief armed with his trade mark MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle and they all faced the large portal of energy, ready for a possible attack, though they were very curious as to how this portal opened in the Paeksis reactor room of all places.

It was then that they spotted something or someone moving through the portal and the Spartan got ready as well as the rest of them for a

very possible fight with whatever or whoever would come out of the portal. And soon, something or someone came outâ€¦.but it was certainly no Harvester Shock Trooper, quite the opposite!

The Nirvana pirates were shocked as the person before them wore a very similar form of the Master Chief's own MJOLNIR Mark VI Armor and carrying a weapon that was similar to the Master Chief's own MA5C ICWS Assault Rifle!!! It was as if they were looking at a mirror of their Spartan before them.

Everyone on either side was standing stillâ€¦.until John spoke as he quickly recognized the new arrival.

"It's good to see you againâ€¦.Kelly-087."

"Squad Leaderâ€¦.is that really you?"

John nodded and in that moment, Kelly-087 placed aside her weapon and walked up to the Spartan and gave a salute and then used the Spartan smile on John's helmet and visor and she then she turned and whistled the same tone that the crew heard and only both Cortana and John knewâ€¦|

It was not long for more figures came on the scene, two of them were wearing the same armor as the one named Kelly-087, John recognized them immediately to be Fredric-104, and Linda-058, both were well armed with Fredric carrying his Combat Knife and his MA5B ICWS Assault Rifle, while Linda carried her BR55-HB SR Battle Rifle on her back and her SRS99C-S2 AM Sniper Rifle.

Both Fred and Linda then spoke.

"Good to see you Squad Leader."

"Nice to see a friendly face."

He was surprised indeed to see three of his fellow Spartans appear out of nowhere and in this dimension no less, the last he had seen them was when they were back on Earth and before he and Commander Miranda Keyes, Sergeant Johnson, and Cortana had gone to face the still united Covenant over Delta Halo. Of course, Will-044 was with them, he was about to ask where was Will-044 when several more figures came through, and these were shorter people but dressed in some sort of armor that had very vague similarities to the MJOLNIR series.

They were carrying several weapons that he recognized as MA5K Carbine, a stripped down version of the MA5B ICWS Assault Rifle, making it lighter and easier to carry, despite the fact this weapon was never used in the front lines due to lack of stopping power, this weapon was a cross between a MA5B ICWS Assault Rifle and a BR 55, and was used by Special Operations Teams such as the ODSs, though one of the new arrivals was carrying a SRS99D-s2 AM Sniper Rifle with him. The others who came through carried a mixture of weapons, MA5K Carbines, M90A CAWS Shotguns, M7/Caseless Submachine Guns, and BR55-HB SR Battle rifles

The armor was not the same as the ones worn by either him, Kelly, Fred, or Linda and had a much slimmer profile but he could tell that it had none of the shielding systems that the MJONIR Mark V and Mark

VI series had on and had thinner armor plating as well, but he recognized the photo-reactive panels on it the armor and quickly realized that. Photo-Reactive panels were armed with highly advanced software systems to mimic all areas of the visual and electromagnetic spectrum, and thus was the system used by the UNSC as their version of active camouflage, but the problem was the panels were erratic and had a tendency to shift irregularly so the Covenant Stealth systems had the one up on the Photo-Reactive Panels, plus if hit by a Flash Bang grenade or by a plasma shot.

The Master Chief then realized he was looking at the Semi Powered Infiltration Armor or the SPI Armor, a less advanced version of power armor which was outmatched by his and the other Spartan IIs MJOLNIR Power Armor but was cheaper to produce, though these seemed to be a lot more advanced than the previous models, it was better than the Body Suits used by the ODSTs in the sense of it's abilities at active camouflage but not much else.

"Who are they?"

It was then that a gruff voice came from another figure coming from the portal.

"They are Spartans John-117, just like you and, the others, and me."

The Spartans turned and in walked a tall but not that tall and muscular, but not that muscular either, there were a set of scars coming from the brow to the chin on his face, giving the new arrival the look of a battle hardened veteran, and he moved like it as well. He had silver hair and carried both a Combat Knife and an older version of the M6 pistol series and he wore the uniform of a UNSC Marine Officer, and on his rank tab was the title rank Senior Chief Petty Officer. The others of the Nirvana had no idea who this man was but John and the other Spartans did and John saluted the older man.

"Chief Mendez, it's good to see you sir!"

Franklin Mendez saluted the Spartan who he himself had trained when John was young and while he rarely showed emotion, he was happy to see one his star pupils still alive and kicking. He replied to the salute and replied.

"It's good to see you too John."

It was then that another person walked through the portal as it began to close, and John recognized her right away, she was tall and wore a lab coat with a data pad in the breast pocket, she wore grey a pleated skirt and dark grey long sleeved top shirt and she had a faint bifocal set of black rimmed glasses with her black/grey hair in a bun and blue grey eyes. He recognized the face easily and knew who it was but

Dr. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, member of ONI Section III and one of the most famed scientists in the UNSC High Command, and the founder of both the MJOLNIR Series, Third Generation Smart AIs and most of all, head of the Spartan II Program. While she was a civilian, she commanded great respect from both the public and high military officials, she also had great respect from him and his fellow

Spartans and she was the only UNSC civilian they would take orders from, she also had a way of embarrassing them as she was able to tell them apart from their posture despite the MJOLNIR Armor they wore. The woman gave a smile towards him and spoke.

"It's good to see you John, it's been a while."

Dr. Catherine turned and was a bit surprised as she gazed at Cortana and so did Cortana as well, and the rest of the pirate crew were shocked as well, as Dr. Catherine looked like an older version of Cortana. Catherine spoke first in this case as she wondered who this person was.

"Who are you?"

Cortana then replied to Dr. Catherine's question.

"It's me Dr. Halsey, I'm Cortana."

Dr. Catherine was quite surprised at this and then turned to the pirates as she and the others gazed around and they turned as the portal behind them closed. They looked at the Paeksis and the pirate crew before them and the female founder of the Spartans spoke to both John and Cortana.

"I take it there's a lot of explaining to do?"

"Yes Ma'am."

-----

Magno and Buzam were very much surprised by the news of their new arrivals, the elderly woman had seen a star born and then saw the defeat of a monstrous fleet of the Harvesters. She then gave the order for the ship to move on, hoping that the message pods had been read by the men and women of both Tarak and Megele, it was a long shot, but it was better than nothing.

Now they had to deal with the fact that they now have new guests to bring into the crew, if there was one thing the two senior pirate officers could agree on at this moment, it was that this day had been full of surprises.

-----

The planet Megeleâ€|

"Lady Grand Ma, we have received a data recording from the missing pirates."

A female aide slides a container with a data disk inside. However a withered hand loomed over it and waved it away, the supreme leader of the females deemed the contents to be of little interest and unimportant.

-----

The planet Tarakâ€|

"Lord Grand Pa, we have received a data recording from the female

pirates."

The images in the data disk were being reviewed by the supreme leader of the men, and with one old finger he pressed the button to delete all the disk's contents.

It became clear the both the supreme leaders of both planets have deemed that the data from a band of renegades to be of little importance.

How wrong they wereâ€¦all of themâ€¦they had no idea what was about to befall them all.

-----

To be continuedâ€¦

-----

Author's notes:

Godâ€¦

It has been a while now hasn't it, but this officially places the end of VanDread Halo in sight, but as we all know, this is only the beginning, with the introduction Linda-058, Kelly-087, Fredric-104, Dr. Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, Chief Petty Officer Franklin Mendez, Spartan III Team Saber's Ash, Mark, Olivia, Tom and Lucy from Spartan III Beta Company, as well as the newly recovered and revived Spartan III Team Katana, you can bet that things in the Nirvana will get very hectic from here on out.

How will the others react when John-117 tells them that the UNSC-Covenant War is over, as well as the fact that the Covenant Separatists and the UNSC were allies against both the Covenant Loyalists and the Flood?

Not to mention what could they say and do when he and Cortana get to telling them that they had been brought to another dimension where the UNSC does not exist and neither does the Covenant but there is a new enemy to fight and this enemy are the Harvesters and who are also the insane remnants of mankind who think that they deserve to be the only human species in the universe?

It's going to be very interesting indeed. As to how they got there in the VanDread universeâ€¦well, that will be revealed in the next series. I hope you all can wait that long as we get ready for the arrival of

VanDread Halo the Second Stage!!!

Things are going to get very action packed in the second installment so I hope you readers are ready for one hell of a ride!!!

And to also show how much VanDread Halo The Second Stage will be different is the introduction on a new OC or Original Character.

-----

The Spartan looked at the female UNSC Marine Sergeant who was aiming her SRS99D S2-AM Sniper Rifle at him, and she quickly placed it down and spoke.

"I'll be damnedâ€¦a Spartan?"

John-117 couldn't help but feel that there was something familiar about this female UNSC Marine. He had been tracking the distress beacon after being told that there were survivors on this planet. And he had found themâ€¦

The woman had dark skin, showing that she was African American and had the same battle hardened look of a skilled Marine and the way she carried her weapon told the Master Chief she knew how to use it with skill, considering the fact she had gunned down three Harvester Mortar Troopers with it.

It was then that the woman spoke.

"You ARE the Spartan I would always seem my dad with, he never stopped talking about youâ€¦in his holo-letters to me and mom, called you the Chief every chance he got."

"Your father?"

"You know him sir, you fought with him beforeâ€¦and you were with him in his final momentsâ€¦back in the Ark."

The Spartan was shocked and he couldn't help but ask.

"Who are you?"

"My name's Jessica al-Cygni Johnson. My father is Avery J. Johnson."

-----

How's that for an attention grabber?

See you there!

End  
file.